

THE CLASSIC ADVENTURER

SAY "KWAH"

CRIME FIGHTING DUO SIMON PRICE AND MIKE LEWIS DON REDHAWK'S MASK AND CAPE

KILWORTHS TREASURES

A CATALOGUE OF MASTERPIECES FROM ONE OF BRITAIN'S GREATEST ADVENTURE WRITERS

GREMLINS AND SUPERGRANS

GURU MIKE WOODROFFE ON ADVENTURE LICENCING AND A GRANDMA WITH SUPERPOWERS

ADVENTURON

HOW CHRIS AINSLEY IS BRINGING ADVENTURE AUTHORIZING INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

GREAT SCOTT

INDUSTRY LEGEND SCOTT ADAMS DISCUSSES HIS EMINENT CAREER

SIMON AINSWORTH

WE DEVLVE INTO THE CATACOMBS IN PURSUIT OF GREEDY DWARF



THE CLASSIC ADVENTURER

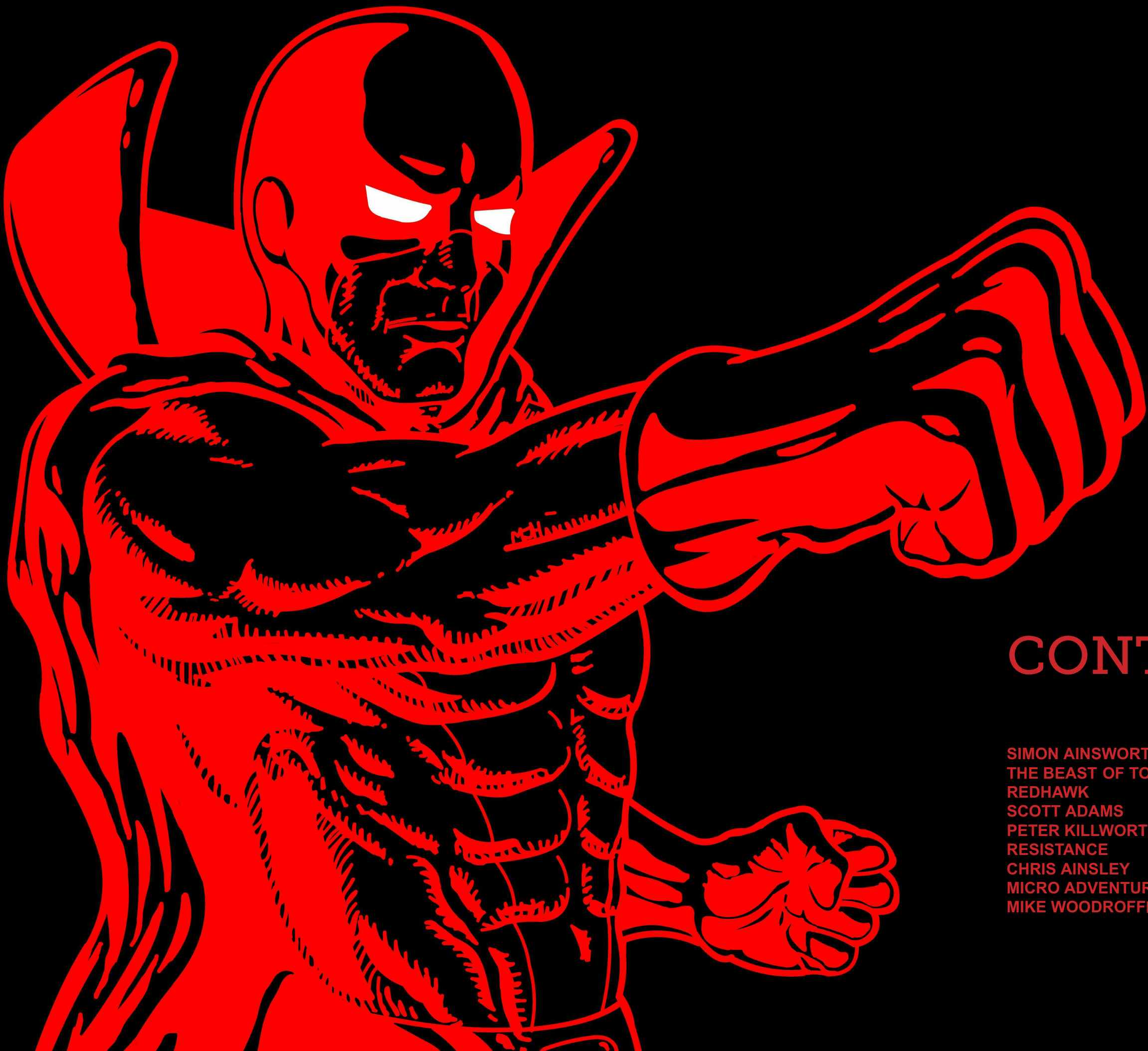
I owned an Acorn Electron as a kid. It wasn't the greatest games machine in the playground, but it did have the best game of all-time, Braben and Bell's *Elite*, and one of the best adventure games of all time, Trevor Hall's *Twin Kingdom Valley*.

For a boy with a fertile imagination, and an obsession with the Fighting Fantasy books, *Twin Kingdom Valley* whisked me through the screen, and into a fantasy world of babbling brooks, Forests, Orcs, Trolls, Goblins, Dragons, Kings and treasure!

I played as many adventures as I could, but It wasn't until I owned a ZX Spectrum and Fergus McNeill's *The Big Sleaze* that I encountered the same immersion with another game. A friend and I spent many weekends hunched over the keyboard, notepad and pen, determined that Sam Spillade would find the missing Maltese Bullfinch.

I'm therefore delighted that both Fergus and Trevor feature in this celebration of classic adventure games, along with many other adventures and authors that transported legions of other kids to far flung corners of their own imagination.

Mark James Hardisty, 2019



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SIMON AINSWORTH

Deep in the twisted tunnels beneath King Ardanga's Castle, stands **Simon Ainsworth**, ready to pursue Arfa, *The Greedy Dwarf*, in one of the fondest remembered adventures for the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron.

Simon Ainsworth first started writing computer programs at Manchester Grammar School in the 1970s. The school was ahead of it's time, encouraging pupils to experiment with it's PDP-11 and ICL 1901A mainframe machines.

[Simon] Before starting my Maths degree at Cambridge I spent 6 months working as a vacation student at IBM, doing a few simple programming tasks on some of their in-house mainframes. It was here that I first came across the *Advent* program, which I think was an IBM port of the original *Colossal Cave* text adventure. I remember enjoying all the logic puzzles and being impressed at how the simple textual descriptions produced a much more vivid and atmospheric world than any video game.

Simon bought his first home computer, a BBC Micro. He'd previously tinkered with a Tandy TRS-80 and Commodore PET, but it was Acorn's offering that delivered a much more user-friendly and powerful platform. Taking



inspiration from *Colossal Cave*, and influenced by regular games of Dungeons & Dragons with friends, he set about creating his own adventure. He devised a story about King Ardanga, Indomitable Lord of the Fiery Kingdoms, and a Greedy Dwarf, Arfa who has stolen three precious jewels. The game starts with the noble king calling on an adventurer to return his treasure along with evidence of Arfa's death.

The name King Ardanga was taken from the Hardanger Plateau in Norway – chosen to give the feel of a northern realm. The name Arfa is just the last 3 letters of "Dwarf", with an "a" added to make it sound a bit like "Arthur" - possibly a reference to Arthur Dent in Hitchhikers's Guide to the Galaxy. The name "Greedy Dwarf" is based on the line "oh foolish and greedy dwarf" from "Hordes of the Things", that was a BBC radio comedy based on Lord of the Rings.

With commercial adventure creation utilities on the BBC and Electron still a year away *The Greedy Dwarf* was written by Simon from scratch using a combination of efficient BASIC with machine code that speeded up the

processing systems. The coding was pretty simple. The main challenge was the memory limit of the BBC Micro, and my first version was a bit slow, hence the need for some machine code.

Another nice feature implemented on the BBC Micro version was the ability to assign often-used adventure commands such as LOOK, INVENTORY and TAKE THE to the machine's function keys, whilst the cursor-keys mirrored the compass directions of travel. It certainly made the game more accessible and user-friendly, complimented by commands like AGAIN - something that became a norm for later games of the genre.

I think I added that mainly to help speed up the process of testing the game. You can probably imagine how many times I had to play it to ensure everything was working, and typing the same commands over and over can get pretty tedious. I did not know that later games had used the same idea – nice to hear that.

Given the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron offered a paltry 32K of memory - a useable figure that could be

"The name King Ardanga was taken from the Hardanger Plateau in Norway - chosen to give the feel of a northern realm."

relevant table searching. It was also ahead of its time in terms of design and construction, separating the engine or interpreter from the adventure logic that was held in a self-contained set of data.

The intention was that entirely new adventures could be created just by changing the data. It makes testing easier: if a function works in one location it will work everywhere. [Plus] the incremental cost of adding new locations is relatively low - it just takes a bit more data.

For the adventure itself I already had a few ideas for logic puzzles, and wanted to include a couple of mazes [that] were deliberately harder to map than the original *Advent* game. I knew I had enough memory for about 60-70 locations, so I started drawing a map on a sheet of graph paper and scattering hazards, treasures and puzzles around it. Finally the messages and location descriptions were added. The tricky bit was fine-tuning to ensure that it was possible, but only just!

Simon wanted to deliver more sophistication to his engine over the usual and conventional verb-noun parser. His addition of adverbs and adjectives was something that was pushed by the game's eventual publisher, proclaiming the inclusion of an "unusually powerful command structure."

My objective was to [...] allow more flexible instructions so that the player felt they were having a conversation with the game. [...] The language parsing had to be pretty simple, due to the memory limits of the platform, so it was crude by the standards of modern natural language

substantially less dependant on which screen resolution the developer chose to use - it was a challenge for Simon to squeeze so many locations into the game, and the expanded parser into the confines of the two machines.

This was the main design challenge and required some very compact data structures to represent the logic and geography of the adventure.

Despite the limited space, he was delighted with the end result, though Simon would have enjoyed an opportunity to add more detail to the prose and expand on the number of locations. The game was picked up by Dorling Kindersley for their new software publishing division called Goldstar Entertainment. There was a chance that commercially viable ports to other machines with greater available amounts of memory would support a more verbose version of the game.

I published a couple of articles and ideas in magazines such as *Computing Today* which was edited by Henry Budgett. Henry then moved to Dorling Kindersley to develop the games software part of their business, so when I wrote *Greedy Dwarf* I think it was Henry who suggested that we turn it into a commercial game.

The Goldstar adverts announced a "New generation of software" along with another text adventure, *The City of Ehdollah* for the ZX Spectrum. It seemed to be the perfect publisher for the author to incubate his adventure talents.

I enjoyed working with Henry Budgett and his team, and

```
You're standing at the top of a spiral staircase leading down to a labyrinth of subterranean passages. There is a doorway to the south-east.

You can see a lamp which is off.

: SE

You're in an ornate corridor on the ground floor of the castle.

: E

Two castle guards spot you and escort you to King Ardanga's throne room.

Ardanga frowns: "How dare you return before completing your quest? Guards! Dispose of this peasant!"

Would you like to start again? (Y/N)

-
```

[Above] Devious puzzles and the risk of an unscrupulous death await you in the catacombs of King Ardanga in Simon Ainsworth's *The Greedy Dwarf*.

I liked the way that they added a lot of value to the product without trying to change the underlying game, We were all keen to try some new ideas rather than simply repeat what had been done already.

Part of the added value was in Goldstar's lush packaging. *The Greedy Dwarf* came in an oversized video-cassette style box, with a beautifully painted cover by fantasy artist Paul Bonner, and an intricately detailed and illustrated manual. It was a lovely product, one that would have stood out on the shelves of any computer store back in 1983.

Yes, I really liked the artwork, and I think I still have a sales poster somewhere. It really captured the spirit of the game and gave it a very professional look and feel.

It was very warmly received by the press, Micro Adventurer commented that "there is [an] addictive quality which makes me want to go on until I find all three gems" and "I hope this game does as well as it deserves to". Electron User mentioned the prose, saying "the quality [of] the location descriptions [are] varied and interesting" and "[the game] scores highly in my top ten adventures." Perhaps the greatest compliments came from revered adventure author and reviewer Keith Campbell, writing in *Computer and Video Games*: "The *Greedy Dwarf* is a nicely presented text adventure" giving it a respectable 8/10.

[It was] very nice to hear what the critics said, especially given that the game started out as a hobby project for my own amusement.

The only criticism levelled at the game seemed to be the difficulty. Micro Adventurer commented that "the puzzles [...] start out hard and get harder. Perhaps the opening game could have been more inviting."

The comment about its difficulty is valid. I was really aiming for players, a couple of my friends in particular, who had already cut their teeth on a few of the classics. I

```
: NE

You're in the castle dungeon.

: E

You're at the foot of the stairs.

: N

You're in the dusty passage.

: NW

You're in the cave of echoes.

: W QUIETLY

You're in the muddy maze.

: READ COMPASS

The needle points west.

:
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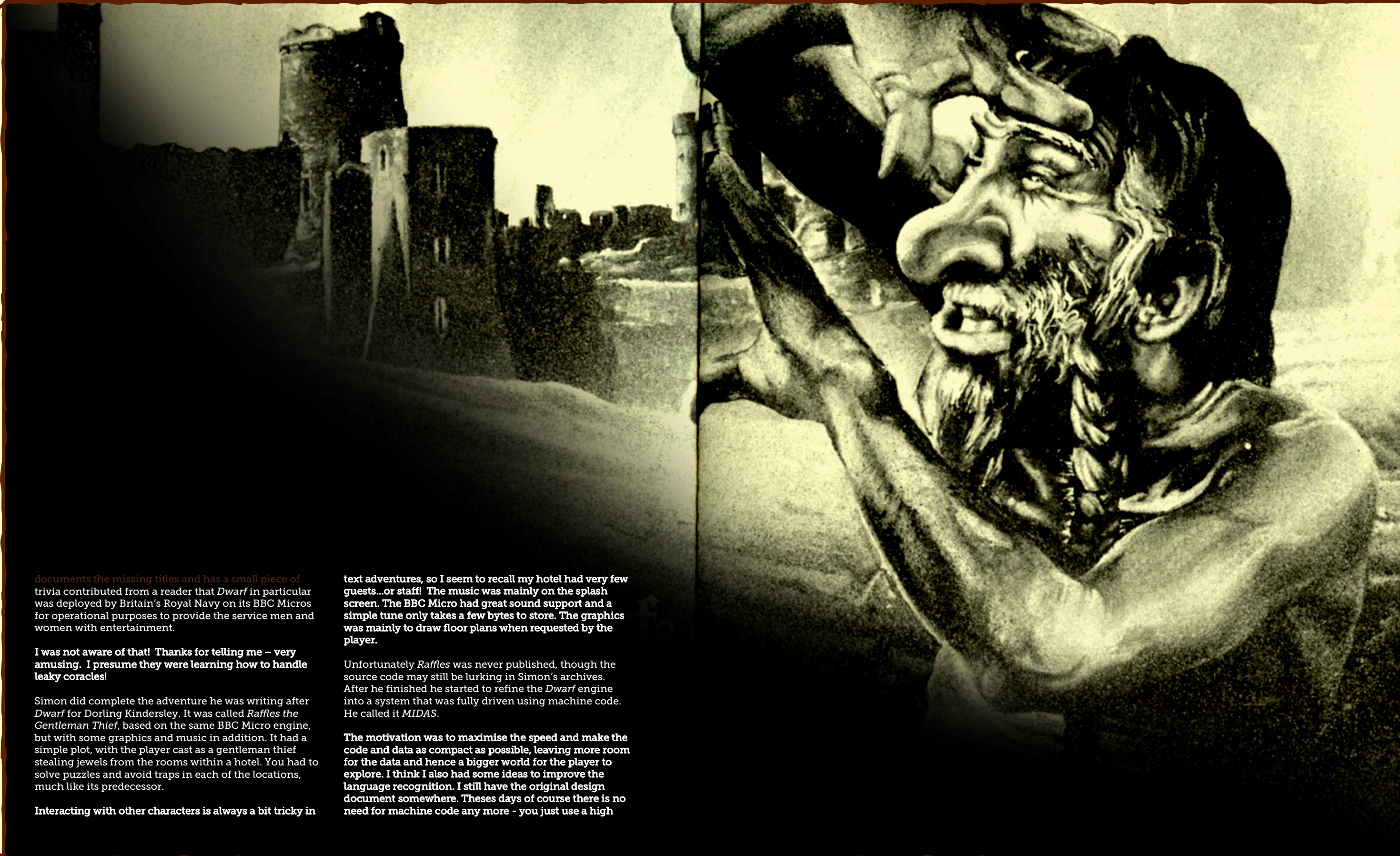
rather liked the poisoned sausages [puzzle]- requiring you to think about your opponent's personality, and the Cave of Echoes - which can only be solved with an adverb. Possibly there should have been some very simple puzzles at the start to help newbies find their feet.

It was the only piece of criticism that reoccurred. It forced the player to make a map, to play some sections over and over to find the traps, and delivered an exceptionally steep learning curve for novices. Its opening gambit, for example, contained several unforgiving puzzles and situations that could result in instant death within just two moves if you strayed into the king's chamber or down into the depths of the catacombs without sufficient light.

Despite the general praise and lavish packaging the game didn't sell as well as expected, with Simon estimating numbers in the low thousands of copies. Perhaps the poor sales could be attributed to the fact that the advertised versions for the popular ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 never materialised. It's Goldstar adventure stablemate *The City of Ehdollah* was also left unconverted, with the proposed BBC Micro and Commodore 64 versions falling by the wayside. As for *Dwarf*, the Commodore version was included on Goldstar's mail order sheets, so the game must have been close to completion, and potentially could have offered those additional locations and puzzles Simon considered within its additional RAM.

I seem to recall that Dorling Kindersley got another programmer to port the game to the Spectrum. I'm not sure what happened to the CBM version, but both ports should have been fairly simple since there was no graphics and the only machine code was for quick table searching. I think I was working on another adventure at the time, so did not get a chance to help out. So, they would have been straight ports, with no extra locations or puzzles.

Frank Gasking's excellent Games That Weren't site



documents the missing titles and has a small piece of trivia contributed from a reader that *Dwarf* in particular was deployed by Britain's Royal Navy on its BBC Micros for operational purposes to provide the service men and women with entertainment.

I was not aware of that! Thanks for telling me – very amusing. I presume they were learning how to handle leaky coracles!

Simon did complete the adventure he was writing after *Dwarf* for Dorling Kindersley. It was called *Raffles the Gentleman Thief*, based on the same BBC Micro engine, but with some graphics and music in addition. It had a simple plot, with the player cast as a gentleman thief stealing jewels from the rooms within a hotel. You had to solve puzzles and avoid traps in each of the locations, much like its predecessor.

Interacting with other characters is always a bit tricky in

text adventures, so I seem to recall my hotel had very few guests...or staff! The music was mainly on the splash screen. The BBC Micro had great sound support and a simple tune only takes a few bytes to store. The graphics was mainly to draw floor plans when requested by the player.

Unfortunately *Raffles* was never published, though the source code may still be lurking in Simon's archives. After he finished he started to refine the *Dwarf* engine into a system that was fully driven using machine code. He called it *MIDAS*.

The motivation was to maximise the speed and make the code and data as compact as possible, leaving more room for the data and hence a bigger world for the player to explore. I think I also had some ideas to improve the language recognition. I still have the original design document somewhere. Theses days of course there is no need for machine code any more - you just use a high

- The Greedy Dwarf -

Three of King Ardanga's favourite gems have been stolen by Arfa, a foolish and greedy dwarf who is thought to live in the caverns beneath the castle.

Seeing this as an opportunity to prove your valour, you have volunteered to recover the gems and slay the thief.

You're standing at the top of a spiral staircase leading down to a labyrinth of subterranean passages. There is a doorway to the south-east.

You can see a lamp which is off.

:

take the lamp

[Above] The 2003 Java version of *The Greedy Dwarf*.

level language and let the compiler do all the hard work. But in the days of the BBC Micro we just had BASIC or assembly language. Memory was a very precious commodity, so you had to make every byte count.

MIDAS was taken no further than pen and paper designs, and in 1985 Simon accepted a role in project development on a banking system in Baghdad. His Middle Eastern adventure consuming his life, and proved too much of a challenge to wish to return to adventure authoring on the Beeb. Much later, in 2003 he revived *The Greedy Dwarf*, registering a new domain with a stack of information, and launching a version of the game written in Java.

The main motivation was to dabble with web technology and see if a free website containing a good game could become a commercial venture, with enough visitors to generate some advertising revenue. It was pretty easy to port as I still had the original source code, and I think I ported it to C first and then from C to Java, making the design more object-oriented.

The game was exactly the same as the original BBC Micro version, and deliberately kept the look and feel of the original text screen. At the time I was quite pleased how well the game worked in that format. The UI was quite simple and a bit crude by the standards of modern flashy commercial web sites,

but it stayed true to the feel of the original game. The biggest challenge was supporting ever-evolving browsers, and the fact that Java was becoming deprecated for security reasons.

It was warmly received and fondly remembered by many in the Acorn community, with plenty of interest generated on the various fan sites. In the end, because of the ageing and unsecure Java version Simon prematurely took the website down rather than port it to a newer and more stable technology. But, with the source code still available there is a possibility that the game may return in the future under another guise, and Simon has considered a mobile version.

Sadly time is the problem. I am kept pretty busy with my work as an architect of banking and investment systems, so youthful hobbies will have to wait until I retire in a hundred years or so!



DESERT ISLAND DUNGEONS

Simon Ainsworth escapes King Ardanga's labyrinth, but on the long voyage home his ship sinks and he's trapped on a desert island with only five treasured text adventures in his inventory.

Well, *Colossal Cave* of course. But can I remember 4 other classic text adventures? Not really – it was all too long ago!

I think I would rather practice my coracle skills, sip on a coconut and enjoy the good life! And if any vertically-challenged chap called Arfa tries to steal my sausages, game on!

Format: Web and Mobile
Publisher: Adventuron Adventure System
Developer: Linda Doughty with Chris Ainsley
Artwork: Andy Green
Release Date: December 2018

THE BEAST OF TORRACK MOOR

30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Chris Ainsley and Andy Green have awoken a monster and given a 30th Anniversary *Adventuron* make over to one of the Spectrum's most advanced and beloved adventures - Linda Wright's thrilling *The Beast*.

Originally released in 1988 for the Sinclair ZX Spectrum, *The Beast* is a text adventure penned by Linda Wright [now Doughty]. It had all the trademarks of a classic detective thriller and was based on the long standing urban mystery of big cats loose in Devon's exmoor countryside. You start the game as a junior reporter for a local magazine, bored of reporting on the humdrum events of the parish. Tasked by the editor to liven up the news, by pure coincidence an ominous letter arrives on your desk and the contents describe strange happening near the village of Puddecombe. The letter goes on to claim that there have been sightings of a mysterious creature and it's this creature that gives the game its chilling title.

The Beast was written using Gilsoft's *PAWS* and showcased Linda's mastery of the tool. It was created for the 128K machine and made full use of the available memory with its neat layout, clever Non-Player-Character programming [giving the illusion of an intelligent, dynamic, inhabited village], real-time clock and beautifully balanced puzzles. Its increasingly creepy plot and strong writing meant that *The Beast* quickly became a community favourite.

The press loved it too - Crash gave it 91% and awarded it a Crash Smash. Their admiration was obvious saying "*The Beast* represents a major achievement in homegrown adventures, bringing together the sophistication of the *PAWS* parser and an intricately woven plot to produce an interactive adventure of a very high quality indeed." That kind of review grabbed the attention of John Wilson of Zenobi and he signed it to his label. He'd been made aware of the game and its "glowing praise" by one of his trusted adventure-players, June Rowe. "[June] was a lovely lady [...] who loved nothing more to chastise me on my bad grammar and excessive swear words" remembers John. "I contacted [Linda] and [...] she offered me the rights to the game, along with *The Jade Stone* and *Cloud 99* and a deal was struck."

Fast forward to 2018 and for this *30th Anniversary Edition* Chris Ainsley has lovingly crafted a special updated version using his *Adventuron Adventure System* complete with the help and blessing of the original author. Chris explained "I've loved *The Beast* since it's

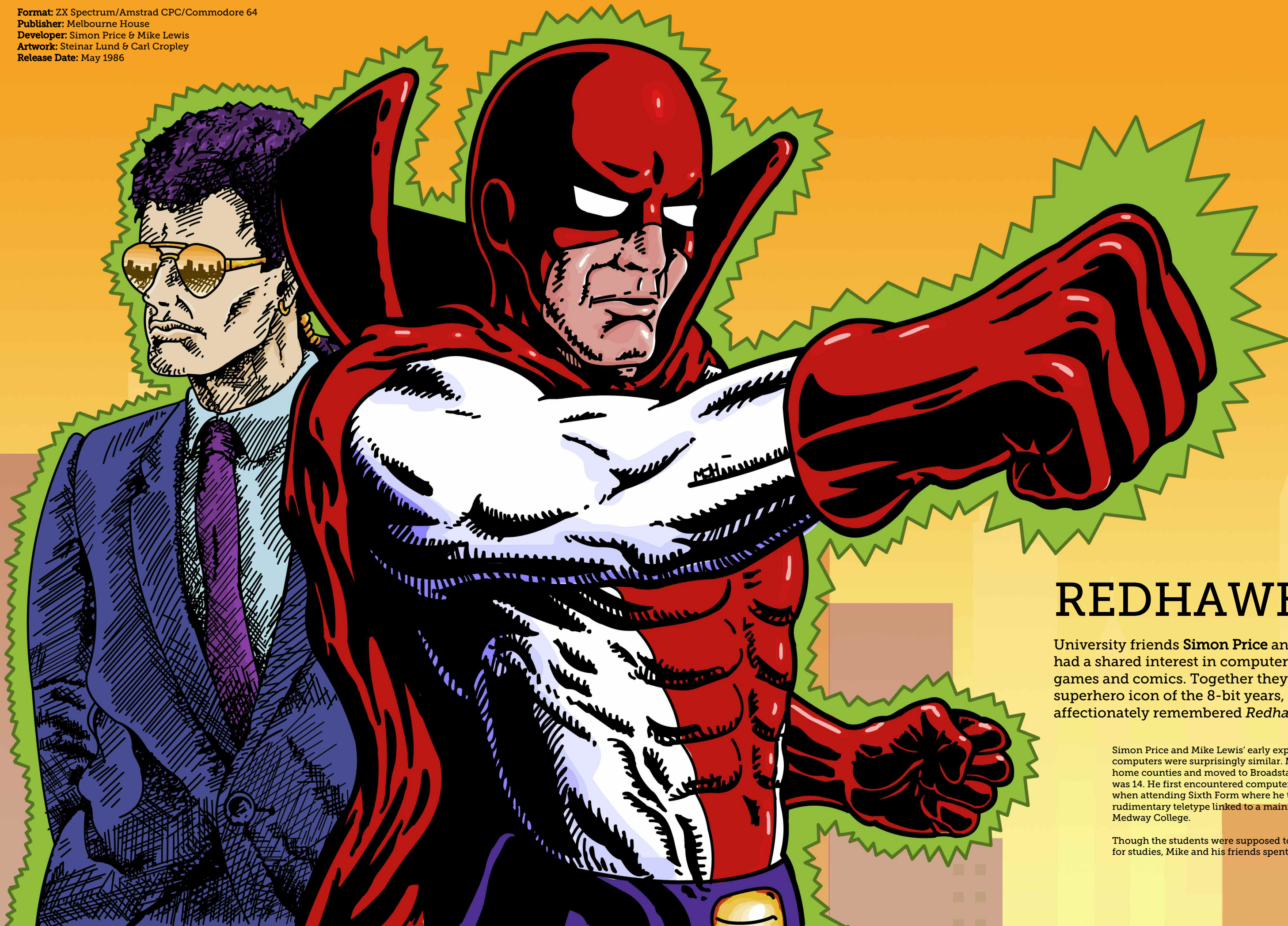
original release. It's so English with tea shops, village greens, church halls, raffle tickets, a local pub and quaint cottages."

The wonderfully English descriptive and atmospheric prose has been retained, but Chris, using *Adventuron* has enhanced the original by overhauling the presentation, tweaking the text and polishing the game's logic to be more sympathetic to the modern player. "[With Linda's blessing] I did change the pre-game to introduce a "no-fail" mechanic" outlined Chris, stressing that *Adventuron* and his conversions are geared more for modern playing tastes. "I also made it more difficult to get into no-win situations [and] added a few reminders [to prevent] missing critical time-based events", he said.

The icing on the cake comes from additional artwork by renowned Spectrum pixler Andy Green. He's added several full colour screens and around 60 isometric 1-bit images that appear in-line with the descriptive text. "The graphics add additional charm to the game", said Chris, "[and they are of] extraordinary quality, especially considering it was [Andy's] first time at producing art in that style."

The Beast was very successful back in its day, and figured prominently in Zenobi's own best-selling charts over the years. This new version deserves to be just as successful given the efforts of Chris, Linda and the modern adventuring community. We hope to see more conversations in the future, perhaps of Linda's superb *Agatha's Folly*.

Format: ZX Spectrum/Amstrad CPC/Commodore 64
Publisher: Melbourne House
Developer: Simon Price & Mike Lewis
Artwork: Steinar Lund & Carl Cropley
Release Date: May 1986



REDHAWK

University friends **Simon Price** and **Mike Lewis** had a shared interest in computers, adventure games and comics. Together they created a superhero icon of the 8-bit years, the affectionately remembered *Redhawk*.

Simon Price and Mike Lewis' early experiences with computers were surprisingly similar. Mike lived in the home counties and moved to Broadstairs in Kent when he was 14. He first encountered computers and programming when attending Sixth Form where he toyed with a rudimentary teletype linked to a mainframe system at Medway College.

Though the students were supposed to access the system for studies, Mike and his friends spent the majority of his

lunchtimes skulking around the computer room writing programs in BASIC.

[Mike] [I was loaned] a UK101 computer [a variant of the Ohio Superboard manufactured by Compukit] and I remember writing a skiing game on it as one of the first things I did. I bought an RCA Cosmac Elf II kit for Christmas 1980, built it, and learned [to program] 1802 machine code. It had [250 bytes] of RAM including screen memory so you were quite limited in what you could do. I did write a *Breakout* game for it, but when you broke through the wall, the ball carried on through the program and the game crashed!

Simon, on the other hand took part in a weekly computer club run by his enthusiastic mathematics teacher at a school in Loughborough. Predictably the club was focused on using the machine for logic and as a tool for calculation, but in the year of *Space Invaders*’ release in the arcades, he had other ideas.

[Simon] I wanted to write my own game. However, interactive graphics seemed a world away when we were handwriting out programs in capital letters on grid-formatted paper. [We] handed them to the teacher for him to take to the nearby university [...] who would send the resultant stack of cards to the computer operators to feed into a mainframe computer. A week later we got a printout back with the results of our run or, more typically, a compilation error report. After 6 weeks I’d managed to write a program to solve some mundane equation and was ready to give up.

Thankfully he didn’t give up, and in the coming months Clive Sinclair’s accessible home computers hit the market and Simon took delivery of a brand new Sinclair ZX80. He ditched his plans to be a chemist and applied for a Computer Science degree course at Stafford Polytechnic. In a stroke of good fortune Mike had also applied for the same course, and it’s here the two met whilst working part-time in a local computer shop writing astrology software.

[Simon] For the third-year of the degree, our year in industry, I was lucky enough to land a job researching adventure games at the Army Personnel Research Establishment [a faculty of the Ministry of Defence] in Farnborough. I had a budget of £3000 to spend on games and computers. I bought more or less every adventure game available in the world at that time and still only managed to spend just over £1000. Inspired by work on *Zork* and *Interactive Fiction* at MIT I developed my own authoring kernel system in LISP and wrote a real-time text adventure based on an officer selection scenario used to assess decision making.

It was Simon’s research and Mike’s hobby writing articles for a variety of computer magazines such as *TV Gamer* and *Popular Computing Weekly* that led the duo to consider combining talents. They decided to write a book based upon their joint interest in computer games, and during their fourth and final year at university they sat in the computer lab, hatched a plan, and penned a letter to Melbourne House.

[Mike] [...] We hadn’t written any games at this point though we had talked about how they worked and were both fascinated by them. I reviewed a number of adventure games for *TV Gamer* and wrote most of their “Adventure Game Special” reviewing *Sherlock* from Melbourne House. [...] We approached Melbourne House with some writing samples and 6 ideas for books. They were interested in two of them and we pitched the adventure games one.

[Simon] We got a nice letter back suggesting that we write for the Amstrad CPC, and they [would] loan us said computer. We co-wrote the book during our final exams. I wrote the software and a couple of

chapters; Mike wrote the game plot and most of the book.

[Mike] On my Spectrum with a DKTronics keyboard and microdrives!

Writing Adventure Games on the Amstrad was published in Great Britain and Australia by Melbourne House in 1985. Covering three comprehensive chapters, from the history of adventure games, to plot, structure and programming techniques it included a complete game scenario called *Witch Hunt* [where the player has to search a village and its inhabitants for a Witch] implemented using the book’s adventure writing utility - *The Adventure Kernel System* or *AKS* for short.

[Mike] I had reviewed *The Quill* and *Adventure Creator* for *TV Gamer* but we didn’t base any of our ideas on that. We were mostly inspired by the Practical Computing article [by Ken Reed in 1980] on the original *Adventure* game.

[Simon] My view was that these authoring tools were too restrictive and required the author to work at a very low level, specifying lots of details that could have been automatically inferred from the game

“[Redhawk] comes from all the superhero clichés and pokes fun at them. I wanted to do a slightly different adventure game.”

definition. [AKS] was technologically based more on the MIT Infocom papers than on anything we'd seen elsewhere and owed more to my LISP game engine.

Despite the book’s exemplar content, wonderful illustrations and clear and concise BASIC it didn’t sell as well as anticipated - perhaps the fault of the publisher and their insistence on the lesser Amstrad as the target platform. Regardless, it established a solid relationship with Melbourne House and Simon and Mike turned their attention to becoming professional game developers for the Australian outfit.

After being unemployed for a short period, they were able to use the government’s Enterprise Allowance Scheme to set themselves up as Silhouette Software [inspired by the black and white graphics on the Apple Lisa user interface] and coded a couple of demos; an arcade adventure tank game on the BBC Micro and the beginnings of a comic book adventure on the Sinclair Spectrum.

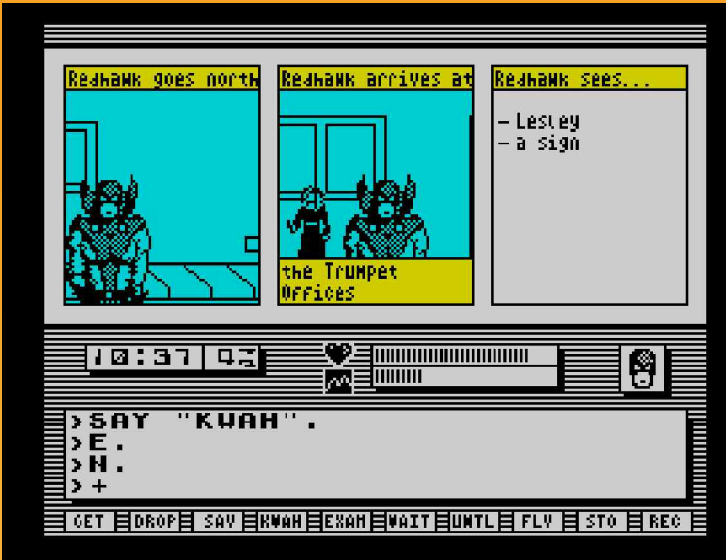
[Simon] Melbourne House had no interest in the BBC as it was a UK-only market and was dwarfed by the Spectrum and C64 markets. So, we got a contract to write [what would become] *Redhawk* for the Spectrum, Amstrad and C64.

The game cast the player as Kevin Oliver, an everyday Joe who by uttering the word “KWAH” [the only word he remembered when waking up in hospital] transformed into superhero extraordinaire Redhawk, ready to use his super powers to defend the city from low-life criminals and arch-villains. As with all staple superhero stories, *Redhawk* begins with Kevin landing a job as a photographer at a local newspaper, and is tasked with manipulating his superhero alter ego in order to increase his media exposure and popularity with the public. As the opening scenes of the game unfold, Kevin finds himself in the lobby of the Daily Trumpet and meets secretary Lesley and paper editor Nigel - both based upon real-life friends of the authors.

[Mike] [Redhawk] comes from all the superhero clichés and pokes fun at them. I wanted to do a slightly different adventure game and we hit on the idea of a game about a comic book hero [in a game that] looked like a comic. Nigel was another friend from university, but we only used his name – he isn’t a newspaper editor!

[Simon] Everyone in there is based on friends or people we'd met. Kev and Nigel were Mike's house mates.

The comic book inspiration came from another string to Mike’s



Redhawk arrives in the Trumpet Offices [Above Left] and meets Lesley in the first game of the series. [Above Right] In *Kwah!* Kevin returns again, and puts his tape recorder to good use in a tricky situation.

writing bow. He had previously published an RPG fanzine called *Dragonlords* that ran a comic strip called *RedFox*. The artist, Alistair McGilvray expanded that into a fanzine of its own and Mike continued to write the script for it. *Redhawk*’s hybrid display of icons and classic typed adventure commands was from Mike’s desire to create a different looking adventure, something that nobody had done before. Displayed on the top half of the screen there was a row of three panels in which the comic action unfolded.

[Simon] We wanted a comic strip and 3 panels was as close as tech would allow at the time on home computers. The look of the controls was inspired by the Apple Lisa, later Mac, and borrowed from the rejected game demo I’d done on the BBC Micro. The scrolling clock was inspired by a Spectrum game - [as we] wanted to combine real-time with traditional adventure games.

Complimenting the comic strip panels and real-time clock were other advanced features such as the clever use of randomised text [a feature they implemented to make the text more interesting since they ran out of time to implement Huffman text compression], a RAMSAVE and AGAIN implementation, a health and energy level and a quick way of entering frequently used commands. It was all built upon Simon’s meticulous research and evolved the AKS engine they developed for the Amstrad adventure book.

[Mike] *Redhawk* [used] an adventure system similar to AKS but more detailed and coded completely newly in machine code. [...] Simon worked on the puzzles mostly and I worked on the graphics. We developed the game on an Amstrad 6128 and then transferred the compiled code down onto the Spectrum. The system was designed so I could drop in the different libraries for the Spectrum or Amstrad and simply compile both versions from the same base code. Simon wrote the C64 conversion using a compiler on the BBC Micro.

[Simon] Mike was the Z80 guy and I was the 6502 mug! The authoring tool [...] generated a relatively compact machine-independent data file that we then wrote AKS interpreters for each of the target machines. This way, we wrote the game once and could run it unchanged on each target machine. The AKS interpreters were written entirely in the assembly language of the target machine.

They added non-playable characters with a hint of intelligence. As Redhawk moved around the adventure, characters, such as muggers and other criminals wandered freely. Having both studied Artificial Intelligence as a module at university it seemed a natural inclusion.

[Mike] it was one part of the course that really interested both of us, so we worked quite hard on those systems. We wanted to create a real time adventure which had some freedom in what order you



performed the tasks in.

[Simon] There was more RPG rule-based combat than anything you could call AI in the game. Any perceived AI was in the mind of the player. It’s quite amusing to look on YouTube at videos of adults playing the game and explaining what they thought was happening when they were playing it as children.

To illustrate the comic, Mike programmed a graphic system that mixed the [well adopted] efficient plot, line and fill of other adventure utilities and added the radical use of bitmap graphics to depict the various characters. The bitmap graphics [and game loading screen] for the game were created by Carl Cropley, someone that Mike met through his comic book writing and was an acquaintance of fellow artist, the aforementioned Alistair McGilvray. It produced a concise and detailed effect, though Mike was disappointed with the sometimes-sparse results.

[Mike] The graphics system was programmed from scratch. [It had] outline graphics that could be resized to give you different views of the same scene and different sizes of character bitmaps to try and vary the look of the game as much as possible.

After 5 months in development, Simon and Mike delivered the game on time and to specification. Melbourne House released *Redhawk* [given the more comic book esque title *The Fantastic Adventures of Redhawk* on the loading screen] in May of 1986. Renowned freelance artist Steinar Lund was contracted to produce the inlay and promotional artwork for the game.

[Steinar] I attended many of the computer shows during the 80s and I believe that is where I made contact with Melbourne House. At that time contact was mostly by post as their office was in Tring, Hertfordshire. Later they had an office in Richmond which made it easier to visit them as I lived in Southampton.

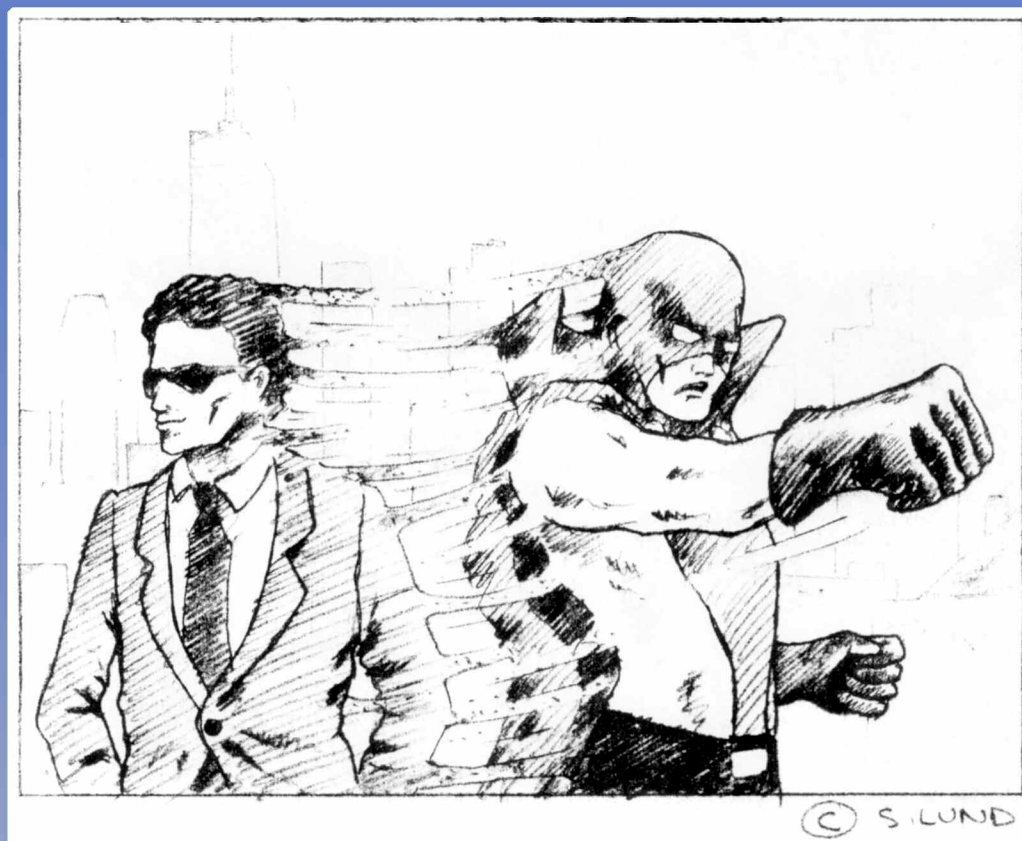
His first work for Melbourne House was in 1983, providing the art for their republication of John Jones-Steele’s *Adventure 1*, published as *The Classic Adventure*. For *Redhawk* he set to work modelling one of his friends as Kevin for the cover.

[Steinar] I wish I could say I modelled for the superhero [character], but nay, it was probably an adaption of body builder references. As a kid I read a lot of DC comics which would have been the inspiration for the illustration style.

Steinar produced 3 pencil designs for the game cover and two for the lettering. Two sketches depicted Kevin and Redhawk with subtle differences to show that one character could turn into the other. The

SAY “KWAH”

It may be a word that turns *Redhawk*’s Kevin from a mere mortal into a crime-fighting superhero, but the origin of “KWAH” is rather straight-forward. “[It’s] nothing terribly mysterious” explained creator Mike Lewis, “it is just hawk backwards!”



[Above and Opposite] Artist Steinar Lund's sumptuous pencil sketched ideas for promotional material for *Redhawk* and *Kwah!*

third showed Redhawk and Kevin with the comic strip behind, and a panelled fight between the superhero and arch-villain Merlin.

In the end Melbourne House chose the second version of the drafts and Steinar took on board their feedback to make the characters larger and more dominant. With Lund's stunning artwork and access to the clever AKS engine and its interpreter technology, it was a publishers dream that no work was required on their behalf to prepare and distribute the game on the leading platforms at the time.

[Mike] Melbourne House were very happy with it a put a lot of publicity behind *Redhawk* with 5,000 "Say Kwah" badges given away.

ZX Computing Monthly commented that "*Redhawk* is a highly original adventure game" whereas Sinclair User commented on the game's Melbourne House trademarks - "the game is highly original and the presentation is slick and it's all cleverly programmed". Crash magazine's Garry Liddon was impressed by Simon and Mike's novel release observing that "the plot and game is full of humour" and it was "great fun to shout 'KWAH' when you're in a tight spot". In the end it was critically acclaimed by the majority of the gaming press receiving a coveted Crash Smash with a review score of 91% and *Redhawk* became the cover star of the June 1986 issue of Amtix magazine receiving 94% in the process.

[Mike] It was great to get good review[s], though the Amtix Accolade and the cover of Amtix was the best thing from my point of view. The games had quite a limited shelf life and basically sold for 6-8 weeks

and then were gone but it was a justification of our approach to designing and writing games.

[Simon] [The reviews were] amazing. Neither of us knew it was going to be on the cover of Amtix.

In the final analysis, *Redhawk* felt a little too short. Mike and Simon struggled with the balance of cramming innovative technology into the game at the expense of puzzles and verbose text. It was a fine juggling act, ending up falling between the two stools of being a graphic adventure [with the comic twist] and classic text adventure.

[Simon] We always had to work to the lowest spec machine in the target market. [...] We ran out of time to do the compression that would have let us fit more text and graphics in. [It] would have allowed us to write a longer, less repetitive plot - something of the text adventure quality of Level 9 games. But, there was a reason that their text adventure games didn't have any [good] graphics.

[Mike] I am not sure that the 128k was around when we first developed the game - it was always a problem with the 48K Spectrum. I think that it was a feature of the machines we developed it for - the game sold pretty well, but was possibly not graphical enough for arcade players and not text-based enough for adventurers.

[Simon] It would have been nice to have used the extra memory available on some systems to provide an enhanced plot but [...] I



think we invented something new that had a feel and mood all of its own. The long narrative never would have worked in a comic format. I still like the silliness of it all [and] the humour was definitely a joint effort. Mike was a fountain of comic and geek jokes and I provided the daft superhero speech.

Kevin and Redhawk returned in 1987 in *Kwah!* with artwork from Crolepy and Lund, and Kevin Wallace on loading screen duties. Our hero Kevin had been promoted from photographer to reporter at The Daily Planet this time having to face a new adversary – the cunningly named evil Dr Foe.

[Mike] Melbourne House asked us for a sequel and we still had ideas for where Kevin could go next. We reversed roles on that one as I developed the adventure and Simon worked on the graphics.

[Simon] It was our idea but the publisher was keen too. Dr Dave Lee was one of our lecturers and my industrial year supervisor.

The storyline continued where it left off after *Redhawk*, with Kevin still battling to restore his memory, having suffered the strange bout of amnesia [apart from remembering to say “Kwah”] in his previous outing. Instead of recording his feats via camera, the player was armed with a tape recorder and could store conversations and sounds on in within the gameplay - key to one of the puzzles when Kevin finds himself bound and gagged and unable to speak.

The graphics received a small overhaul, but the screen layout and engine remained virtually the same meaning *Kwah!* took a meagre 6 weeks to develop.

[Mike] [That was] mostly changing the graphics engine and developing new puzzles for the adventure.

[Simon] [...] We already had the engine and only made minor enhancements to the code. Mike wrote a great plot and I made the aforementioned minor enhancements. We spent much more time on gameplay and plot development.

Despite *Kwah!* being a more rounded title, sales were disappointing as the 8-bit market edged into decline. With Melbourne House in turmoil too, a further outing for our crime fighting hero didn't materialise.

[Mike] We weren't asked for [a sequel] by Melbourne House and [we] had moved on to developing other things after *Kwah!* If Melbourne House had stayed around, rather than being taken over by Mastertronic, then we might have developed another sequel.

[Simon] We'd decided, like a band, to go our own ways although we remained best friends.

[Mike] I moved to London and Simon moved to Somerset so we decided to develop our own games – though we still talked most days and swapped bits of code between us.

Mike attempted his own fully fledged animated adventure and penned *The Mystery of Arkham Manor*, released by Mastertronic

under the Melbourne House brand a year later. He felt that the company had stopped supporting the genre in favour of arcade titles and quickly became disillusioned with the idea of writing more adventure games.

[Mike] I did work on a couple more adventures but on 16-bit machines – doing a lot of the coding work for *The Hound of Shadow* from EA and developing *The Acrobat* for Rainbird. *The Acrobat* built on the idea of *Redhawk* with a comic that filled the screen to produce a point and click adventure where you interacted with the actual comic pages. You could turn back in the comic and look at previous pages to see what had happened and even print them out to build your own comic as you moved through the game. Sadly, Rainbird were bought by Microprose who didn't know what to do with it and eventually paid me a kill fee for the game.

After a bout of ill health and various software jobs Mike founded a small wargaming company called Black Hat Miniatures and a toy soldier company called Imperial Miniatures. He now works at home producing toy soldiers and models for various customers around the world.

Simon shared Mike's disillusionment with the industry, and he didn't want to become an in-house developer as games shifted from a cottage to a more professional industry.

[Simon] I wanted to write a pure text adventure and did *Demon's Tomb* [*Demon's Tomb: The Awakening* was released by Virgin Mastertronic in 1989] but the genre had stopped making money.

He is now working as an AI contractor with a specific interest in real-time text analytics of in-game chat and state-of-the-art NPC speech generators using deep learning neural networks.

They are still in touch, so perhaps Kevin may finally find out who he is, and the word “KWAH” may be uttered again..





DESERT ISLAND DUNGEONS

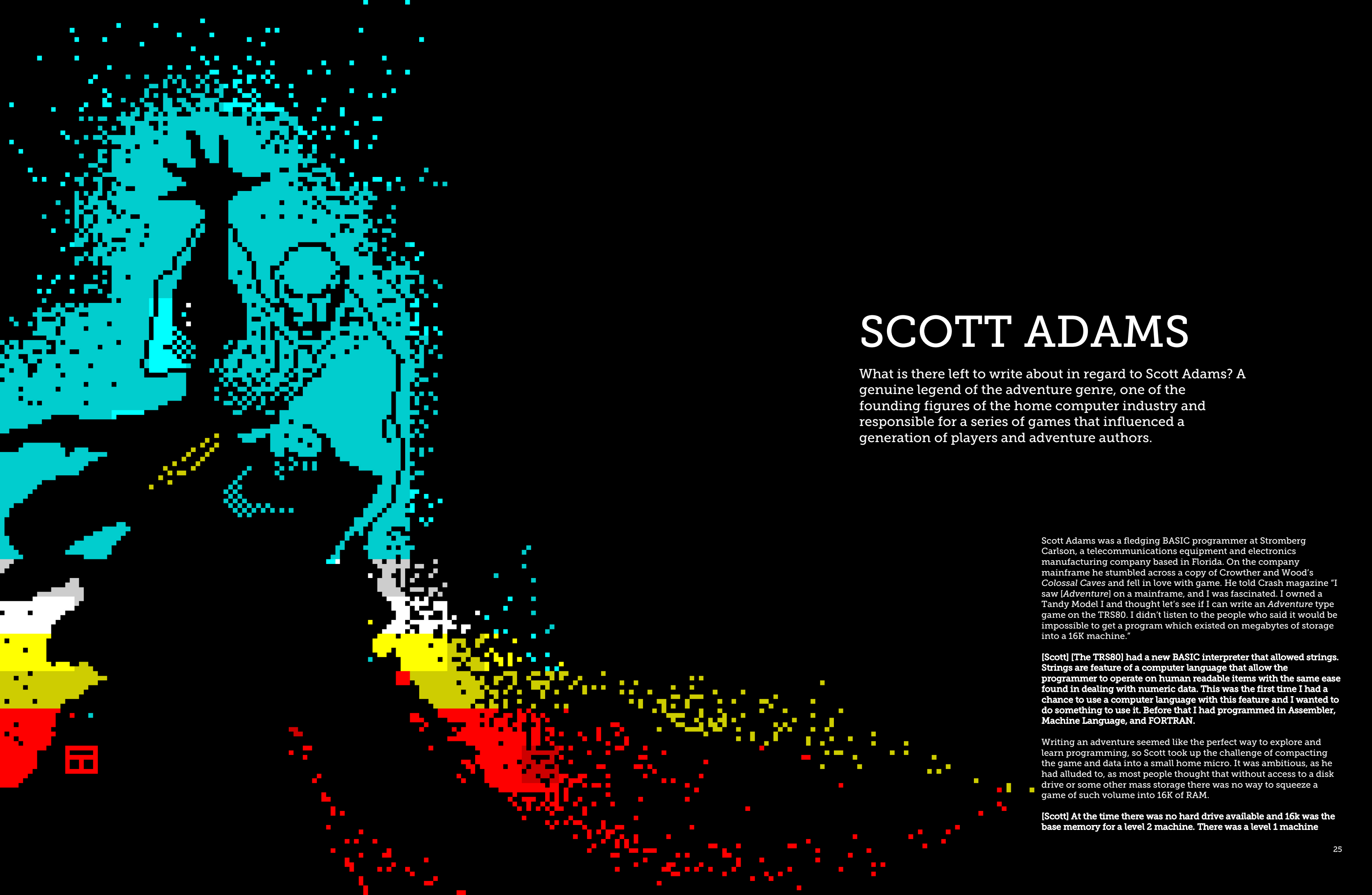
Our superheroes unmasked, *Redhawk* creators **Simon Price** and **Mike Lewis** are unable to say “KWAH” and escape the desert island. They are left with just five text adventures to play whilst they await rescue.

Mike Lewis

Adventure - the original game as it is a classic
Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy – one of the Infocom games I played a lot
Sherlock – I enjoyed playing it on the Spectrum and it was great for its time
Return to Eden - one of my favourite Level 9 games
Planetfall – because I never actually finished it

Simon Price

Infocom's *Deadline* - I've never got very far in it but it has the real-time element that inspired AKS's real-time features
Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy - just brilliantly funny and quirky, just like the books
Level 9's version of the original *Adventure* - because it makes me feel all nostalgic
Infocom's *Zork* - to remind me that my parser in *Demon's Tomb* is better
Kwah! - I've forgotten the solution and would have to solve it from scratch



SCOTT ADAMS

What is there left to write about in regard to Scott Adams? A genuine legend of the adventure genre, one of the founding figures of the home computer industry and responsible for a series of games that influenced a generation of players and adventure authors.

Scott Adams was a fledgling BASIC programmer at Stromberg Carlson, a telecommunications equipment and electronics manufacturing company based in Florida. On the company mainframe he stumbled across a copy of Crowther and Wood's *Colossal Caves* and fell in love with game. He told Crash magazine "I saw [*Adventure*] on a mainframe, and I was fascinated. I owned a Tandy Model I and thought let's see if I can write an *Adventure* type game on the TRS80. I didn't listen to the people who said it would be impossible to get a program which existed on megabytes of storage into a 16K machine."

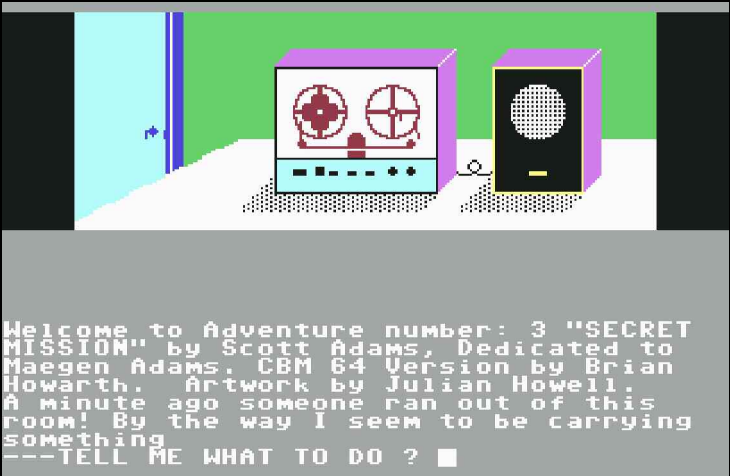
[Scott] [The TRS80] had a new BASIC interpreter that allowed strings. Strings are feature of a computer language that allow the programmer to operate on human readable items with the same ease found in dealing with numeric data. This was the first time I had a chance to use a computer language with this feature and I wanted to do something to use it. Before that I had programmed in Assembler, Machine Language, and FORTRAN.

Writing an adventure seemed like the perfect way to explore and learn programming, so Scott took up the challenge of compacting the game and data into a small home micro. It was ambitious, as he had alluded to, as most people thought that without access to a disk drive or some other mass storage there was no way to squeeze a game of such volume into 16K of RAM.

[Scott] At the time there was no hard drive available and 16k was the base memory for a level 2 machine. There was a level 1 machine



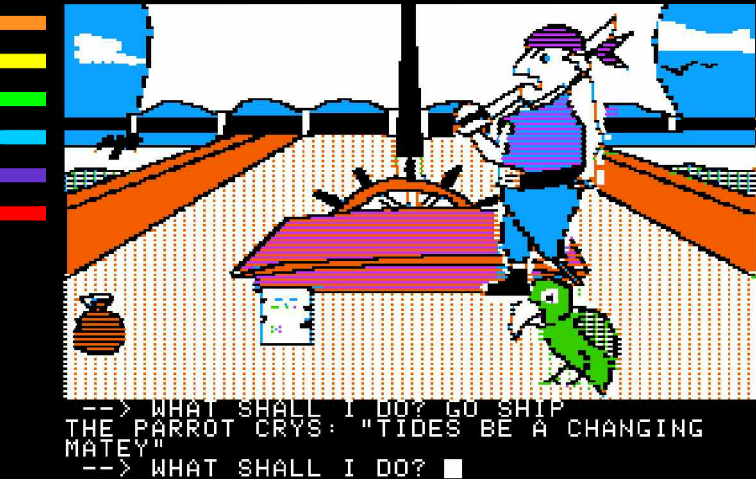
[Adventureland] The very first in the series and the game that exploded the genre onto the home computer scene. It may be a mere treasure-hunt with a simple 2-word parser, but *Adventureland* is a piece of text adventure history.



[Secret Mission] Originally called *Mission Impossible*, but later changed at the request of a certain TV series, it's the first game where Scott introduced a set mission for the player to acheive, in this case saving a nuclear plant from a saboteur's bomb.



[The Count] Scott constantly tried to innovate by introducing new subject matter and gameplay in each iteration. In *The Count* he explores a well-trodden horror story with a complex puzzle chain and day/night cycle.



[Pirate Adventure] Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum. The last game co-written by Scott and his first wife in BASIC, and one that tasked the player in recovering Long John Silver's lost treasures.



[Voodoo Castle] The fourth game in the series, set in a castle inhabited by the Count of Cristo. The player has to lift the voodoo curse that afflicts said Count by the clever manipulation of the games objects rather than foes - given the absence of other characters.



[Strange Odyssey] Drawing on his love for Science-Fiction, *Strange Odyssey* blasts the player into space and is one of the better games of the series. With a distinct Star Trek influence, there's a good sense of the unknown with some abstract and typical Adams-esque puzzles.

produced with 4k but that was not even worth considering for the game.

As well as being revolutionary in his microscopic programming, Scott, at his first attempt conjured the underlying methodology that would become an industry template for adventure writers from that point forward – he separated the adventure's text and logic [that would be the same whatever the platform] from the game's engine or interpreter [a small piece of code specific to each home computer].

[Scott] It was just the way I approach most programming challenges. I shoot for what seems best to tackle the current issue. Here I was creating both the software and the game play at the same time. I did not know what the game play was going to look like and figured I would need to be able to change that as I progressed. I did not try other methods before this one as it seemed it would be most flexible way to approach the problem.

After weeks of furious planning, his notes and designs evolved into a working interpreter and the outline of a skeleton adventure called *Adventureland*. Though a plot-less treasure hunt, akin to its influencer *Adventure*, it certainly wasn't a port, but more a homage to the Crowther and Woods' namesake.

[Scott] I never had contact with either gentleman. It would have been a great pleasure to have been able to chat with them, but it never occurred. I never saw the original software for *Colossal Cave* and I wanted to make my own game.

It took a further six months of play testing before *Adventureland* was ready for release and the game's lengthy and intensive development put a strain on Scott's marriage.

[Scott] I tend to get very focused on tasks at hand. I suspect I have a bit of Asperger's in that regard. So I would work all day on mainframes and then come home and work on creating a game at home. So I did tend to neglect my wife. She made it clear one day by hiding my current work in the oven and threatened to turn it on unless we talked. I realized I need to make time for both. We came to an understanding and a schedule that would allow both family time and my creative time I needed.

Luckily Scott was able to rescue his master disks from a fiery death, and he and his wife began to give copies away to their friends and pushed cassettes into the public domain via mail order adverts in SoftSide magazine. It was almost a year before dealers showed any interest in what he was doing, but eventually The Software Exchange and Creative Computing Software – two publisher-distributors picked up *Adventureland* for a wider release.

[Scott] They had non-exclusive licences to the game [and] I wanted to get them into as many hands as possible and didn't mind having other avenues for sales.

The original package for *Adventureland* was something typical of the early videogame cottage industry – cassettes were without labels, hand produced and bundled with a simple typed instruction sheet. Once they obtained their first commercial deal, Scott improved the packaging for the more expectant and growing in sophistication consumer taste.

[Scott] A Radio Shack in Chicago owned by Manny Garcia, asked to come up with something besides unlabelled tapes. The original packaging we came up with was pretty simple - we went from unlabelled tapes to baby bottle bags that had a label tape and a folded

SACO SOFTWARE

Adventureland wasn't Scott's first retailed game. He had previously developed two games, *Backgammon* and *Dog Race* that he sold as SACO Software - which stood for Scott Adams software.

business card at the top that described the game, and had a hole drilled in it for pegboard hanging.

The first release of *Adventureland* was a success, gradually increasing in sales from the original order of just 25 tapes that Scott received. He involved his wife in writing a second game in order to avoid more martial dispute - perhaps making Alexis the first female adventure writer in the process. It was called *Pirate Adventure*, and they collaborated on a third game called *Secret Mission* before realising that creating games could yield a viable income and formed his company Adventure International in the fall of 1978.

[Scott] I had the hope that my games would be fun for people outside the USA. [By naming the company International] I was dreaming big.

As *Pirate Adventure* and *Secret Mission* were both written in BASIC, Scott needed to convert his engine into machine code to make it easier to port to other systems. The Apple II was the most popular machine in 1979 in the US, but in the end, the adventure interpreter, simply called *ADVENTURE* found its way onto at least a dozen different platforms.

[Scott] I was already a mainframe assembly language programmer and [...] worked completely in machine language without the use of an assembler. [Moving to machine code] made the [engine] more portable. I could take the 8080/z80 versions and put it on other home machines with these processors, I also did ports to 6502/6800, Apple et al, machines and later to Intel (IBM) and its derivatives.

Since the BASIC version of the *ADVENTURE* interpreter was now obsolete, it gave Scott the freedom to share his creation with the public for the first time. It wasn't a commercial decision, but something more philanthropic - akin to Ken Reed's 1980 dissection of the original *Adventure* engine [in Practical Computing] that inspired other authors – it was simply an indicator of the times and the software development community. Code and ideas were to be shared with peers. Full listings of *Adventureland* and *Pirate Adventure's Adventure Builder* and *Adventure Interpreter* featured in 1980 issues of SoftSide and Byte Magazine.

[Scott] My engine was never in public domain, by the way. Even though it was shown in Byte Magazine it was still copyright protected. On one hand, the BASIC was already out of date, since every time I released a new game, I usually added some new feature internally. I also was happy to share what I did to help others. I have heard from many people over the years how this article was a major boost to their own careers. Many of them ended up being the founders of major software houses.

From 1980 and onwards Adventure International saw unprecedented growth and even began to advertise for game submissions from external authors. They published a series of non-adventure games on their label such as *Sea Dragon* and *Preppie!*.

But, Adventures stayed as their staple genre. Between 1980 and 1982

nine more games would be released; *Voodoo Castle*, *The Count*, *Strange Odyssey*, *The Mystery Fun House*, *Pyramid of Doom*, *Ghost Town*, *Savage Island I* and *II* and *Golden Voyage*. Each game saw a new iteration of Scott's *Adventure* engine, an exploration of a different subject [Wild West, Pirates, Ghosts and so on], and each game saw the master introduce new gameplay elements into the series. *Secret Mission* removed the treasure-hunting for a plot-driven narrative, *The Count* introduced a day/night cycle for example, and *Ghost Town* contained one of Scott's more intricately designed puzzle-chains.

From being on the cusp of the videogame industry, AI were now in the midst of it, making huge profits from the booming home computer market both here and in the US. Game developers were centre-stage, and Scott was no exception.

Each of his games were trademarked and marketed using his name, as was popular in the US where inlays featured those responsible for the title. Household names such as David Crane, Ed Logg, and Ken and Roberta Williams were at the forefront of player consciousness,

“I was basically vain and liked seeing my name on the game. After all the work I put into it, I wanted folks to know who I was.”

and it helped to generate a fan following for each of the authors. Consumers would eagerly await the chance to purchase any subsequent games form their favourite designers. A Scott Adams game was a mark of quality.

[Scott] I was basically vain and liked seeing my name on the game. After all the work I put into it, I wanted folks to know who I was. It did though give folks expectations of what to expect, and they were happy to look for more games with my name on it.

Gone too were the baby bags and unlabelled software and in came desirable, professional cardboard packaging complete with full colour inlays and beautifully produced artwork and inserts. Even more innovative was the inclusion of a female protagonist on the newly revamped *Adventureland* artwork and marketing.

SYS 32592

There's a good chance that if you owned Commodore VIC-20 in Britain that you first experienced playing one of Scott's adventures on cartridge. Before the deal with Mike Woodroffe in the UK, Adventure International signed an agreement with Commodore to release his games both here and in the US. It was hugely lucrative for both parties, and Commodore reputedly earned \$1.5m from the deal.

The VIC-20's limited architecture proved a challenge, even for Scott, and he ended up cramming every single byte he could onto the cartridge - so much so that the autoloader feature was overwritten and players had to type a command to run the game.

“The entire game ran from the cartridge, the memory was only used for run-time variables” recalled Scott, “It was a many month project getting the VIC working. Commodore sent down some of their engineers, Andy Finkel and Jeff Bruette to help with the project. [We used] the final bit [...] to get it working, [and] it was the reason the SYS 32592 command was needed to start the game playing.”

[Scott] It just seemed like a good idea to be able to appeal to both male and females. Males are drawn to the picture of an attractive female and females were able to picture themselves in the game. A win-win situation.

As with all other games, the author's DNA could be traced within the game rather than just as a signature on the inlay. Adventure blogger Jimmy Maher commented, “It's Adams's indelible, lackadaisically enthusiastic writing style that stamps all of his games better than could their maker's signature”. Scott had moulded a recognisable approach to designing, writing and delivering his adventures.

[Scott] I worked with pen and paper to create the initial code and database and then I would work off of the printer listings. Originally, I had a small printer that used special paper that it “burned” the words on to. I didn't know how big the game would be when done so I kept adding rooms, items and puzzles until I couldn't fit anymore. I was a voracious reader all my life and read primarily Science Fiction and some fantasy. I also was a nature counsellor in my teens. I lived summers in the Ocala National Forest at a youth camp. I spent a lot of time in the woods, swamps and lakes. I always enjoyed animals and had numerous pets.

As Adventure International grew, Scott struggled with the non-technical challenges of running a company and towards the end of 1982 his productivity waned. He employed more hands and enlisted the support of Kem McNair as Art Director who had visited Scott after writing his own guitar teaching program called *Guitari*. Struggling with the code he called into the company and asked anyone if they could help.

[Scott] [Kem] was an incredible artistic asset and was wonderful to work with. He is still in Florida and we are Facebook friends to this day.

McNair was the perfect answer for an emerging challenge in the

adventure market. Changes were afoot, and games were beginning to feature graphics, proving that classic text adventures were popular when illustrated. The likes of Sierra were starting to push the barriers and expectations of players. Ken McNair was brought on board to steer Adventure International's artistic output and a subset [Adventures 1 to 6] of the original series all received a graphical revamp complete with a new moniker – the *Scott Adams Graphic Adventure* [SAGA] label. It was a turning point in design for Scott, who now had to balance an even more finite amount of memory between words and images.

[Scott] Sierra was releasing graphic adventures as were others. So, we thought we'd see if there was an interest. Graphics were always added after the fact. The game was written as purely text first and then graphics were added. So, the graphics never limited the design process and were just used as an enhancement.

Thankfully for the purist, Scott included a command that enabled each of his games to be played in different modes – with or without images. The graphics in the games held no hints or clues, and they were purely included for illustrative purposes only. Scott was open minded enough to see the appeal of both aspects to playing an adventure.

Alongside Scott's own games, other adventure authors bolstered the Adventure International catalogue. Cliff Johnson's *Labyrinth of Crete*, David Simon's *The Stone of Sisyphus* and Bob Laforge's interesting *Interactive Fiction* [more akin to an interactive novel or multiple-choice game] series were all published by AI. Scott also launched the “Other Ventures” label that would “contain adventures written using different methods, though still meeting the high standards set by Scott's original series!” A total of five games were released via “Other Ventures” - John Rausch's *Classic Adventure* and Jyym Pearson and Norman Sailer's *Crowley Manor*, *Escape from Traam*, *San Francisco 1906* and *Saigon: The Final Days*. These titles were never added to the official Scott Adams adventure canon, but two games by external authors were – *Pyramid of Doom* written by Alvin Files and *Golden Voyage* by William Demas.

[Scott] The two authors of those games were fans who were able to reverse engineer my assembly language and figure out the *Adventure* language structure I used. They then wrote their games in this and sent it to us in the mail. I was very impressed with that and worked with them over a period of time to refine the games before we published them as part of the series. [...] I am still in touch with Alvin Files, but I don't know what happened to William Demas. William was still a young teen when we worked with him on *Golden Voyage*. He had incredible potential. Alvin Files I believe turned his creative talents to Law, but he was also very gifted.

It's interesting that Alvin and William had chosen to disassemble Scott's code rather than take inspiration from the available adventure engine listings that appeared in magazines. Perhaps that the code wasn't clearly free to reuse meant that authors in the US didn't experiment with writing their own games, and they didn't experience the same explosion in indie adventure titles as we did this side of the pond. Games made with *The Quill* or *The Graphic Adventure Creator* were royalty-free to distribute, but those utilities never managed to gain traction in America. You also have to consider the huge popularity of adventure-themed books and magazine type-in listings that advocated a huge boost in hobbyist creativity. There was a small number of homegrown adventures in the States, but they failed to incubate their own indie labels, an FSF,

8th Day or Zenobi Software for example.

By happy coincidence there was one adventure enthusiast that was casting his gaze across the pond. Mike Woodroffe [see elsewhere in this issue] who ran his own computer shop was struggling to supply his customers with enough software. After playing an adventure from Tandy, *Pyramid Adventure*, he tracked down the developer address and looked to begin importing American software to feed the British market. During the process of speaking with his trans-Atlantic colleagues, he was made aware of the popularity of Scott’s games, and took an even bigger interest in Adams once he found out that he was creating adventures.

[Scott] [Mike] contacted us. He was a big fan and very friendly. He already had a software company and was doing well. His licensing of our titles and use of the Adventure International [under the sister company Adventure International UK] name was quickly worked out.

British hardware mirrored Scott’s TRS80 – with a small amount of RAM and cassette storage as standard. His minimal-requirements engine was perfect for machines such as the BBC Micro and ZX Spectrum, and a budding English adventure author called Brian Howarth had already begun the process of creating a port to his own TRS80 machine. Brian joined forces with Mike Woodroffe and Scott oversaw the conversion of his adventures to the UK market, maintaining a light touch to approach since he trusted them to deliver the goods. During their relationship Scott visited the UK twice and attended various trade shows, including a memorable trip to a PCW show.

[Scott] I greatly enjoyed my visits to the UK and meeting folks. It was fun to get meet folks in person and also I enjoyed sightseeing in London. I remember going to see Big Ben and Westminster Abbey as one of the major highlights. The people at the trade show and at AI:UK were so nice and I was also amazed at the politeness of the cab drivers as well. I got to sample my first real fish and chips (in newspaper) as well as an excellent curry. All in all, it was some great times!

Whilst here, Scott featured in a plethora of interviews with a salacious press. In an interview with Micro Adventurer magazine he proclaimed to be developing a new adventure creator language and an enhanced parser that would feature in his future games.

[Scott] [I] just never got the time to give it the time it needed. There was more demand for the games than tools it seemed at the time. If you search the web for Scottfree you will see some authoring systems others did based around my interpreter.

His lack of investment in the parser was one area of criticism that he generally encountered, given that there was a distinct lack of innovation in his *Adventure* engine. Games did seem very samey, and after the overhaul that included graphics, the parser was the obvious target for critique. 2-word games were becoming prehistoric, and they didn’t compare well with the ever sophisticated Melbourne House English or Infocom-esque demands. Later in the year, at CompuServe’s Games Special Interest Group [GamesSIG] Conference on adventure games Scott announced an update called SAGA+ saying that it would match the sophistication of the Infocom parser, citing an example of “You can do something like the following: PICK UP ALL THE GEMS THEN CLIMB THE WALLS AND GO EAST AND LOOK IN THE CRIB AND GET IT”. What appeared didn’t quite match the hype.

Jimmy Maher commented that “Adams’s greatest failing in the long run was perhaps his inability to make the transition from treasure-hunting text adventures to the more sophisticated storytelling of Infocom’s interactive fiction, as evidenced by his seeming disinterest in improving the core technology of his games beyond gilding these simplistic lilies with graphics and colours.” That was somewhat true, but SAGA+ did introduce several more complex commands, such as recognising IT as the last synonym, the use of ALL, and the ability to fulfil commands TO objects or AT them.

[Scott] [The planned] SAGA+ was more than a 4-word parser. It was able to handle fuller sentences with verb, noun, adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, etc. One problem was we were still trying to support the 8-bit market as well as allow the games to be backward compatible, so the vocabulary was never fleshed out as much as it should have been. [...] We did introduce a better parser with *Spiderman* and *Fantastic Four* games that was in the same class as Infocom, as the market towards more powerful machines was growing.

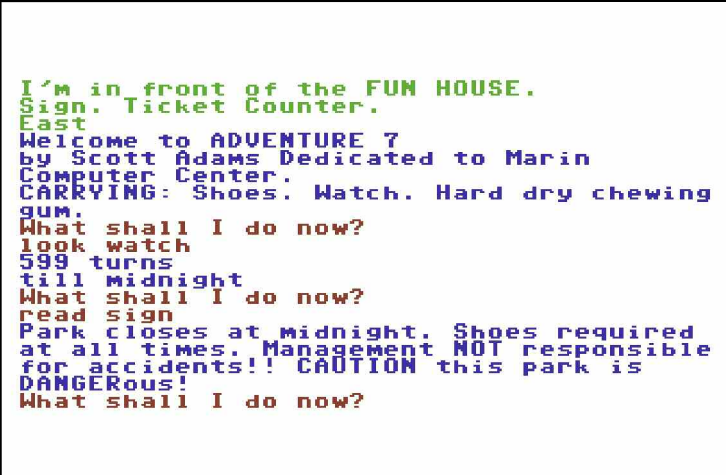
Spiderman and *The Fantastic Four* were part of Scott’s *Questprobe* series of games, produced in conjunction with Marvel Entertainment, LLC. Along with a deal with 20th Century Fox to create a game based upon The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across The 8th Dimension it was the second licencing agreement announced by Adventure International in 1984.

[Scott] They wanted Buckeroo Banzai to be a cult classic as soon as it came out, so they were preparing all merchandising, including computer games, in advance. They were right that the movie became a cult classic. Only it didn’t do it at first, as it failed at the box office. But oddly enough, today it is indeed a cult classic.

The Marvel Comic tie-in was revealed in London in February 1984 when Scott was visiting the LET International Trade Show held at the Heathrow Pentra Hotel. Joe Calamari, the VP of Marvel approached Scott himself, as he wanted to take the brand onto home computers and recognised Adams’ as being one of the market leaders. An audacious twelve game, ten-year licence was agreed, with *The Hulk* pencilled in as the first game in the series.

[Scott] Marvel contacted us. They wanted to get their IP into the home computer market and everyone they asked told them to contact Adventure International. Marvel was very easy to work with and gave me complete freedom in how I was using their characters. Their only concern was that any art, in-game or physical, had to meet their editor’s approval. A fan recently pointed out that since Marvel has been licensing its products for games, *Questprobe* is the only one that ended up as Marvel cannon and is part of the Marvel universe.

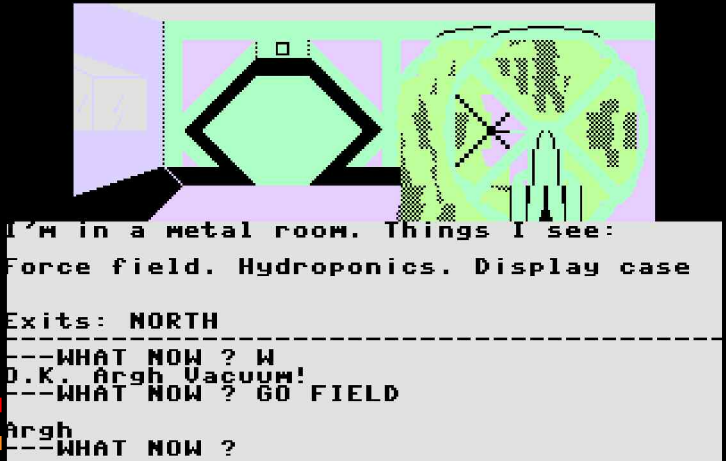
The Marvel franchise has exploded in recent years, but even in the 80s characters such as Spiderman and The Hulk were hugely popular thanks to large comic sales. Scott received a pre-release copy of the Marvel Universe Encyclopedia and used it to research each of the characters having been given free rein to pick and choose the subject of the games. He selected The Hulk to start, telling Calamari that the games would evolve improve over time so he wanted to leave their more provocative and exotic characters, Spiderman in particular for later games. “I want to get it right, and when I get to Spiderman I want to do it better” he told The Retro Hour podcast in 2018.



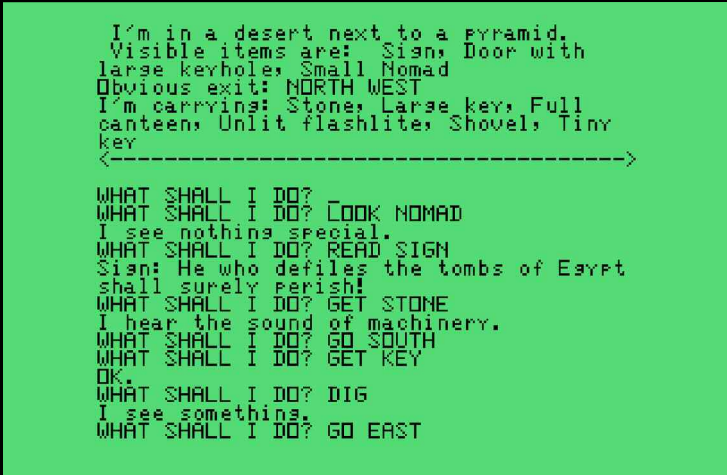
[Mystery Fun House] All the fun of the fair! a bomb is due to explode at a carnival and the player has to get inside the Fun House and defuse it. Again, Scott introduced another new gameplay element - giving the player a watch that ticks down as the impending explosion looms.



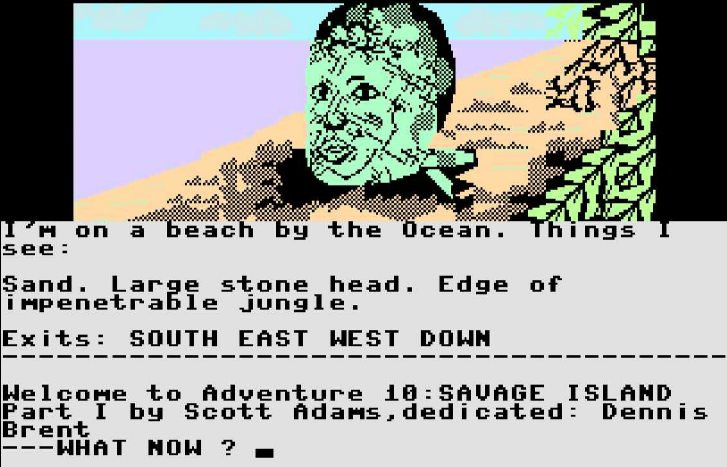
[Ghost Town] Another treasure hunt, this time whisking the genre off to an abandoned mining town in the Old West. Don your spurs and fight rattlesnakes, runaway horses and sharpshooting cowboys.



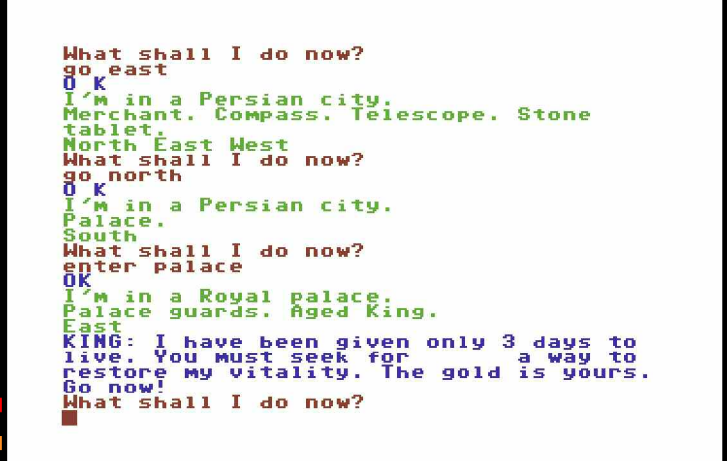
[Savage Island, Part II] Requiring a password from the first part to proceed, Adams ramped up the difficulty level to 11 in the sequel to the original game that adds an alien backdrop to the desert island.



[Pyramid of Doom] Written by Alvin Files and polished by Scott, the treasure hunt is transported into the ruins of Ancient Egypt in a rather straight-forward plundering of jewels and gold.



[Savage Island, Part I] Cast adrift on a desert island, *Savage Island* is an incredible unforgiving adventure, and despite the decent plot, attempts to kill you at every given opportunity.



[Golden Voyage] A game steeped in the mythology of the sea, from mysterious potions of youth and monstrous creatures of the deep to cutt-throat pirates and vagabonds. *Golden Voyage* is a sparse but entertaining ride across the waves.

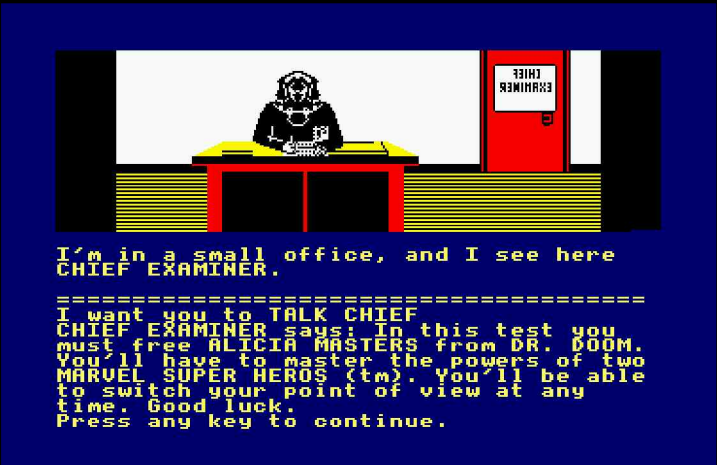


[The Sorcerer Of Claymorgue Castle] Taking its inspiration from Infocom's *Enchanter*, treasures are replaced by magic in Scott's spellbinding wizard yarn that showcases some tricky puzzles and superb graphics.

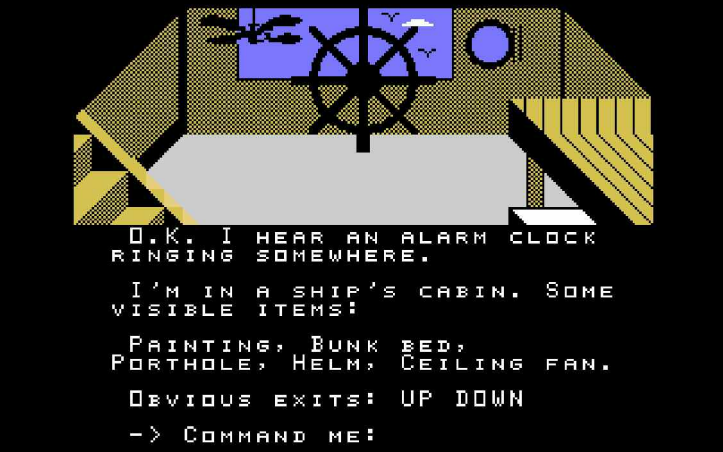


Command me? BITE LIP
Ouch! I scream! I'm The Incredible Hulk (Tm) now! Rove Breaks!
Hit-Return.
Hit-Return.

[The Hulk] The much anticipated first game in the *Questprobe* series was somewhat of a disappointment (aside the fantastic Hulk graphics) as the game relies on some laborious repetition and an innate knowledge of the comics.



[Human Torch and The Thing] The best in the *Questprobe* series, disposing of the treasure-hunt for a more narrative-driven experience. The SAGA+ engine is used to its full potential, and Scott gives the player the novel ability to switch between protagonists.



[Return to Pirate Island] The unofficial number 14 in the series, only released on the Texas Instruments home computers, demonstrated Scott's indelible love for the Pirate theme and the original *Pirate Adventure* game.



to be falling, and I see here a strange cloud. I see exits to the north, south, east, and west. SPIDER-MAN, I want you to ■

[Spider-man] Despite the superlative graphics, the web slinger was reduced to a rather a lacklustre and tiresome treasure-hunt. But, the game sold well and is fondly remembered due to the terrific central character.



[The Lost Legends of Redwall: Escape the Gloomer] The first in a series of six games from Clopas is based on popular best-selling book, Mossflower. A beautifully made, and ultra-modern take on the text adventure genre.

[Scott] In this case I asked and received from Marvel a subscription to every marvel comic book that was currently shipping and I read them all. I also got a pre-released version of Marvel Universe that was a compendium of all characters in the Marvel Universe. I wanted to make sure the lore I came up with fit properly when I gave them my plan and outlined the first comic book for the series. They felt that it was totally acceptable.

Scott injected plenty of comic book lore into the games, and several of the game's puzzles required specific knowledge of the characters and the actions they would perform. For some, it proved to be a drawback for the novice adventurers and players that were unfamiliar with the series.

[Scott] The games were expected to be bought by the comic book fans so it did not prove to be an issue. Also, some versions of the game also had a smaller comic reprint included with them.

As well as the clues in the bundled comic strips, each Adventure International release was supported by an official Scott Adams Adventure Hint Book that players could send away in order to receive cryptic clues on game solutions. They were hugely successful, rumoured to have sold more copies than the game's themselves.

[Scott] Oddly enough, folks who would pirate the game would still buy the hint book or hint sheet. Back then copiers were not available except at libraries, etc. and it would cost someone time and effort to go make a copy for someone else. The hint book was also multi-page which made copying more expensive.

Unfortunately, with an economic downturn in the US videogame market, *QuestProbe* #3, *The Human Torch* and *The Thing* was the last game in the series that Scott commercially released. The final game incorporated the more sophisticated parser and was perhaps Scott's most complete adventure with a better plot and the novel ability to switch characters. Bucking the trend of the majority of licences, especially where precious character licencing was concerned, the player (even as a Superhero) could die.

[Scott] For every adventure I did, I always wanted to do something I had not done in any previous game. Since there were multiple characters in *Fantastic Four*, I came up with controlling two of them and it worked out very well. [...] Having characters die happens all the time in the Marvel universe and frequently they come back either the same or changed. Marvel never had an issue with this.

Retrospectively, the *Questprobe* series seemed somewhat lacklustre. The lengthy development time for the games, with a strict approval process and the addition of production of comic books and other paraphernalia to support the release all added to the frustration. It coincided with a stumbling of sales in the UK as Mike Woodroffe eagerly waited for games to fulfil the demand of the home market. The next planned game, *The X-Men*, was started but never finished, though rumour is that an incomplete version still exists.

[Scott] Some of the starting rooms were created as well as some of the puzzles. Also, the final puzzle was created. I still have the database - and I'd be happy if Marvel wanted to contact me about it!

Looking back at the games, they feel like a missed opportunity. They were rather plotless, and a vehicle for solving arbitrary puzzles rather than taking advantage of the wonderful Marvel Universe. Like *The Hobbit* though, many people fondly remember the titles because of

the subject matter - and that can only be a good thing. It was also one of the series that Scott tried to promote onto the upcoming 16-bit machines, with an Atari ST release being a particular favourite of his. Another personal highlight, and one that Scott is incredibly proud of is that he got to appear in the games and the comics as the Chief Examiner.

[Scott] I had always signed mail etc. as Scott Adams, Chief Adventurer. When I came up with the Chief Examiner title they asked me what I thought the character might look like. When I suggested that they could pattern after me, their artist asked for a picture which we mailed them. On receipt they replied that I "looked sufficiently evil" and that they could use it.

Tragically, after the release of *The Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle* [unlucky adventure number 13], Adventure International stumbled into bankruptcy. The US economic downturn in 1984 was estimated to have decimated the videogame market by a staggering 97%. By 1985, an industry that was worth more than \$3billion fell to a value of just \$100million. Though the market may not have been viable for a hardware manufacturer, for a software producer it continued to grow, just not at the predicted astronomical rates. Companies with feet in both camps such as Atari and Commodore suffered greatly. It shouldn't have affected a small and agile software business such as Adventure International, but they were in big trouble.

[Scott] We were self-funded and did not put enough aside to weather downturns. There was a very big downturn in the industry at this time, as major players dropped out. Bottom line was that it was bad business decisions made by the company owners, me and my wife. [...] We outgrew our revenue stream. I recently read an excellent book by Phil Vischer called *Me, Myself and Bob*. I could relate greatly to what Big Idea Productions went through, as it mirrored in many ways what happened to AI. We spent money where we shouldn't have and didn't spend it where we should.

After the closure his company, Scott returned to systems programming and went to consult for a variety of firms in Wisconsin. In the late 1980s he worked for Starsoft to help them convert their games to other platforms - *Pirates of the Barbary Coast*, *Black Monday*, *Stock Market: the Game*, and *Psycho* all have Adams in the credits.

[Scott] Looking in retrospect the closing of AI was one of the best things that happened to me. I learned that we are all one heartbeat away from death and one bad decision away from financial ruin. I learned to put my trust in Jesus and it has changed my life tremendously. If I had continued being a fantastic success, I never would have grown spiritually. Because of that crash, I eventually meet my current wife Roxanne who I did not even know when I owned Adventure International. She has been an incredible friend in the past 30 or so years. [...] Another important fact is the additional children we now have, I would never have gotten to known. [...] No, I am grateful for what happened in the past and I wouldn't change it. Ultimately 100 years from now, none of this matters. What really matters is preparing to spend eternity with the One who loves us more than anyone we know and wants to be our friend.

Scott's faith has been instrumental in his life and he coded a remake of *Return to Pirate Island* in 2000 and then a game called *Inheritance* [inspired by the King James version of the Bible] started in 2003 and finished in 2013.

[Scott] *The Inheritance* was me trying again as a solo author, but

creating something similar to my classic games. The end result was not as good as I wanted, so the game has been withdrawn from the market. *Lost Legends of Redwall: Escape the Gloomer*, though, was a team effort, and one that I am very proud to be a part of. It is so different from the text adventures of the last century that we have trademarked a new term for it, Conversational Adventure games.

Gloomer has been developed by Scott’s latest enterprise Clopas LLC [meaning Glory to the Father from John 10:25] founded in August 2017 along with his aforementioned second wife Roxanne.

[Scott] Besides being the impetus for Clopas being created, she is today very much the heart of the company and its Vice President of Operations.

The aim is to be a family-oriented games producer, and they’ve partnered with Soma Games who have acquired the licence to the New York Times best-selling and award-winning Redwall books by Brian Jacques – who has sold a staggering 35 million copies. *Gloomer*, loosely based upon the book Mossflower adds to Redwell lore with new characters and storylines. It’s available modern platforms such as Steam and iOS and has recently added Alexa voice-integrated support.

In a wonderful philanthropic gesture, Scott has recently donated his entire archive to New York’s Strong Museum [devoted to the history and exploration of play]. In total, a collection of 130 items including the earliest known packaged copy of *Adventureland* and *Pirate Adventure* have been gifted. “Scott Adams’s *Adventureland* was one of the first commercially available works of interactive fiction and a true game-changer in the burgeoning personal computer game market,” commented Jeremy Saucier, assistant director for the International Center for the History of Electronic Games.

[Scott] It is supposed to be unveiled this July and it will be interesting to see how it is received by the people visiting. I got a chance to also see the storage and library behind the scenes at the Strong Museum, where scholars get to research the vast collections stored there. I expect the items I donated will help edify future generations about the initial birth and founding of the home computer market.

Clopas have also recently revealed a teaser trailer for a new reimagining of Scott’s original adventure, *Adventureland XL*. He told ZZap! columnist Stuart last year that copyright for his games was still disputed, but after further investigation clarified to The Classic Adventurer that he was the holder and is now able once again to exploit his back catalogue. The game is due for release in the Summer of 2019 and has been advertised under Clopas ‘ new “conversational adventure” tag.

[Scott] I don’t want to give too much away at this time. The official title is *Adventureland XL* and it is currently planned for late summer release. Watch our web page [www.clopas.net] and Facebook page [www.facebook.com/ClopasLLC] for more information.

Hi fantastic legacy is summed up beautifully by Thomas A. Christie in his *The Spectrum of Adventure* book: “Adams had definite influence both technical and stylistic upon British adventure gaming” began Christie, concluding that “the fact that his titles were continuing to be converted for the [European market] long after the glory days of their original appearance was indicative of just how venerated and commercial viable they remained”. For many British adventure players, it was with one of Scott’s titles that they first encountered and fell in love with the genre.

[Scott] I am constantly humbled by what my classic games meant to those who played them. I have been in contact with thousands of fans over the years. Some are now well-known titans of the current gaming industry. Others went into different careers. The one thread throughout though was that my classic games were extremely meaningful to them. I can only surmise this was something God was using, as my intent was simply selfish. I was writing the games to make money. Yet they touched many lives for the better and that is what awes me. God used my efforts for so much good. I pray that God can continue to use me and Team Clopas to touch people in a positive way.





PETER KILLWORTH

Peter Killworth is one of the most important figures in adventure gaming. With help from a cohort of university peers, he was one of Britain's greatest adventurer creators taking mainframe adventures into the commercial world with Acornsoft and Topologika. Colleague, and co-adventure author **Jonathan Partington** shares his memories of those pioneering Cambridge days alongside one of Britain's greatest adventurer authors.

Peter Killworth worked at Cambridge University as a senior research associate at the Department Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics. He spent most of his employed time in the field of dynamic oceanography and climate, creating computer simulations of the oceans.

It was on an internal flight whilst in the US that he first learned of Crowther and Woods' *Adventure* and the "joys of mazes and rod-waving." He tracked down a version when he returned home to Cambridge and set about familiarising himself with the game.

[Jonathan Partington] There was an implementation on Cambridge University's [mainframe] computer, due to Mike Oakley, and I played it, and eventually solved it. We had lots of other games available too,



e.g. ones based on *Star Trek* and *Rogue*, but [Adventure] was the most complex and interesting.

Killworth gave his two sons credit for looking at *Adventure* from a gamer's perspective other than the academic gaze he had previously applied. He told Micro Adventurer in 1984, "I was constrained about what I know about computers, but they treated the terminal as a person. While I was trying to work out what an axe was doing in a computer program, they were chopping the nearest tree down."

He was soon engrossed in the genre and co-authored his own adventure called *Brand X* with fellow mathematician Johnathan Mestel. Created on the university's IBM 370 mainframe computers [nicknamed Phoenix after the operating system they ran] they called it *Brand X* in an effort to mask its identity and hand the game an air of mystique. It worked, as over the next few months they continued to refine the game, engineering changes and suggestions from captivated colleagues who had stumbled onto their creation on the network.

Once finished, it was a case of serendipity that he got involved with Cambridge's fledgling software publishing arm of Acorn Computers. He explained to Micro Adventurer, "A friend of mine wrote a statistics program for Acornsoft, and they gave him a free computer. I thought they might give me one too." He trundled over to the Acornsoft offices with a copy of *Brand X* under his arm, and they duly snapped up the rights to the program - handing him that coveted brand new BBC Micro in the process. Killworth ported the larger mainframe game over onto the BBC, and Acornsoft christened the game *Philosopher's Quest* [later re-written for the Acorn Electron to be faster, more grammatically correct and with a polish to the presentation]. The game was hugely successful, going on to sell over 20,000 copies and convinced the publisher that the genre was worth investing in.

Acornsoft retained Peter's talents as a freelance adventure writer and he duly rewarded their faith with two original games in 1983;

"Acheton was converted for home computers, with some modifications to remove Cambridge in-jokes, e.g. the mummy was originally called Yelka Oekim in honour of Mike Oakley."

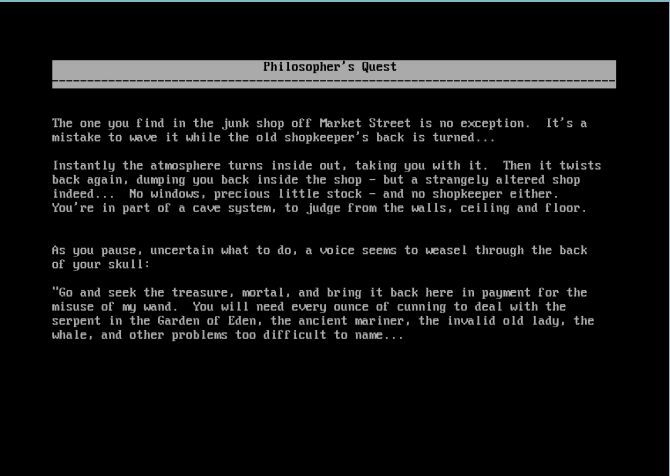
Countdown to Doom and *Castle of Riddles*. Well, original may be stretching the bounds of reality: *Riddles* was sold as a magical adventure with "wizardry and hocus pocus of all kinds" and the player's Tolkien-esque quest was to rescue the "ring of power" stolen from a local warlock. It was exceptionally difficult, becoming a benchmark for Killworth's vicious puzzle streak, and was used as bait for a completion competition in *Your Sinclair*, eventually won by a certain Peter Voke. *Doom*, on the other hand was far more rounded as Killworth took longer to work through the plot, and cleverly mapped out the game design for two months on paper, writing and testing the puzzles. "It's design is tight and perfect in its own uncompromising way, it's puzzles often brilliant" commented venerable adventure blogger Jimmy Maher.

In another part of Cambridge University a trio of graduate students Jon Thackray, Jonathan Partington and David Seal used Phoenix to write a series of *Adventure*-inspired titles. One of these, penned by Partington called *Hamil* was a reworking of the classic *Colossal Cave* treasure hunt. It was set within the confines of a castle, with the player hunting down valuables and depositing them into the vault. It had a limited parser, and like Killworth's *Countdown*, contained a rather academic approach to puzzles. Whereas *Countdown* had the literal link of counting turns to the fate of the planet, *Hamil* included an elaborate sequenced timer and a random and arbitrary death sequence when one lingered in a single location.

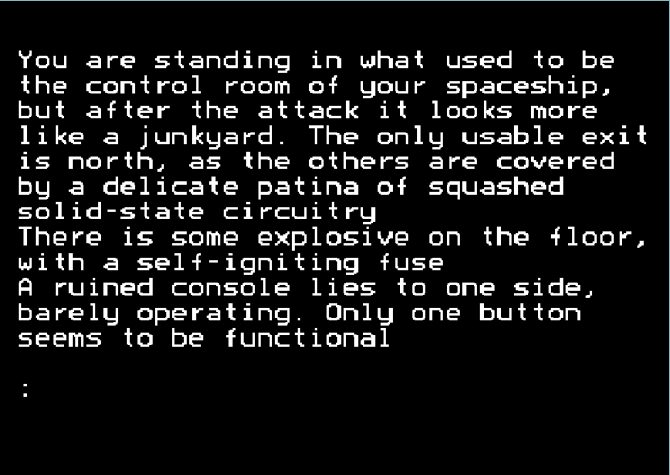
[Johnathan Partington] In 1980 onwards I was a postdoc [research fellow] in the Pure Maths department. Jon Thackray and David Seal were research students in the same department, about 3 years below me. [I met Peter Killworth] around 1981, maybe earlier. [He] was a


```
Dead end. 60
!E
You are in a sandstone chamber. There is a dim
light to the west. The passage continues downwards
to the east, and another tunnel goes to the north.
!E
It is pitch dark.
!turn on lamp
Your lamp is now burning brightly.
You are in a wide low-ceilinged room with several
exits. To the south, stone steps descend into the
cave, while a good passage exits to the north. To
the west a tight tunnel leads up, and a narrow
crack goes eastwards.
!E
Dead end.
There is a tiny wooden casket nearby. It is
closed.
!■
```

[Acheton] A game of significant importance for the adventure genre, and of particular significance to British gaming. *Acheton* was a contemporary of *Zork*, and the first *Adventure*-inspired game outside of the US. Killworth ported this huge, tough adventure written by David Seal, Jonathan Thackray and Jonathan Partington.



[Philosopher's Quest] Starting life as *Brand X* on Cambridge University's IBM mainframe computers, *Quest* was written with fellow mathematician Jonathan Mestel. It was Peter's best-selling game and expressed his "joy of mazes and rod-waving."



[Countdown To Doom] A classic science-fiction romp, *Countdown To Doom* set the player on the surface of unstable planet Doomawangara after their spaceship has crashed. It's a race against the clock to repair it before the planet's violent climate sealed their fate.

postdoc in Applied Maths [...] which was next door but shared some of the computing facilities. [...] Until we started writing adventures, there wasn't so much in common. We got on very well: he was friendly, calm, and we had many laughs together.

Before *Hamil*, Thackray, Seal and Partington had worked for some time on *Acheton*, one of the largest adventure games ever created. It's credited with holding the world record for mazes [lodestone, ice, wizard, snakes, hedges – to name but 5] and for being the first adventure penned outside of the US in the mould of the seismic *Adventure*. Under the hood it was different too. Whereas *Countdown*, et al, had been ported by Killworth as translations [with significant differences between mainframe and home versions], Thackray and Seal helped devise what was quickly becoming the preferred standard of programming an adventure – separating the home computer specific interpreter from the mainframe database. Converting *Acheton* proved so unwieldy that Acornsoft forced home users of BBC Micros to use both sides of a disk, or to reconfigure two separate floppies to hold the program and database on two pieces of media.

[Jonathan Partington] David Seal and Jon Thackray wrote the first half of *Acheton* together, using the language they had developed for the university computer. I solved it - I think I was the first, and this led to writing the second half with them, and learning their programming language. So, you may say that the credit is 1/5 to me, and 2/5 to each of the others - at least for the game – the language was all theirs. After I had learned the language I was ready to write some smaller games on my own, and wrote three in a year on my own. Then *Acheton* was converted for home computers, with some modifications to remove Cambridge in-jokes, e.g. the mummy was originally called Yelka Oekim in honour of Mike Oakley.

As we discuss the conversion of *Hamil* and *Acheton* it's worthwhile acknowledging Jonathan's own towering contribution to the genre alongside Killworth. As *Twisty Little Passages* [see issue 3] author Nick Montfort identified, mainframe developers in the US [apart from Infocom] seldom amassed a body of work beyond their campus walls, but of the 15 games authored using Phoenix, Partington is credited on a staggering 8 of the titles. Not all of these titles were converted to home micros, and some too late to market and thus Jonathan didn't receive the recognition, praise and accolades of Killworth, or of other commercial authors such as the Austin Brothers or Anita Sinclair, Ken Gordon and Hugh Steers for example. Nevertheless, Montfort does acknowledge his body of work, saying "[Partington was] the most active Cambridge IF developer [...] before the era of individual authorship outside of academia [and the] commercial heyday."

[Jonathan Partington] it was only a hobby, and I was more concerned with getting a permanent academic job, getting married, etc. it's nice to know that some people are still interested in the games 35 years on, but I wasn't shooting for immortality, or even great commercial success.

In the summer of 1984 Killworth penned "How To Write Adventure Games" for Penguin, whilst working at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Cape Cod, USA. It was aimed at owners of the Acorn Electron and BBC Micro, and contained several adventures of increasing complexity named *Caves*, *Mini* and *Dragon* – all written using BBC BASIC. It had cover artwork taken from *Kingdom of Hamil* and outlined technically complicated concepts such as game state flags in well-documented and neatly formatted pages. The code was lavish [albeit with some unreadable bitwise logic in some instances] and Killworth took great pains to explain the workings of virtually every line of programming. Perhaps the biggest takeaway from the book, apart from design ideologies, was Peter's embracing of new technology, and specifically the Seal and Thackray idea of compartmentalising a game's data away from a generic interpreter. The final chapter entitled "Where do I go from here?" discusses plot and player enjoyment. These pages probably give one of the greatest insights into the adventuring mind of Killworth, covering in depth how he approached adventurer authoring and construction. Of specific note are several traits of Killworth's adventuring character – the construction of plot, the chaining of puzzles, and the inexplicable desire to make the player's

life as uncomfortable as possible. Robin Johnson, acclaimed author of *Detectiveland* and *Draculaland* used the book as a reference and recognised that "Killworth [saw] it as fundamental to the job of the IF author to make the player suffer - I'm not interpreting; he repeatedly says this in exactly those words."

Quondam, written with Rod Underwood was next. It offered a whole new challenge and was only recommended for advanced players by the publisher themselves. Upon release *Quondam* received plenty of criticism, occasionally for being another treasure hunt, but generally for its random puzzles, usual inexplicable deaths and insane level of difficulty. It was the final game ported by Peter for the Cambridge company. Not by choice, there were other factors at play, and at the start of 1985, after a disastrous Christmas the previous year, Acorn Computers wobbled on the brink of bankruptcy. Bailed out by Olivetti, its apparent saviour [due to its distribution network], things didn't improve, and its eventual demise loomed on the horizon. Company founder Hermann Hauser was replaced, and a second round of Olivetti financing was announced with Acornsoft virtually dissolved as an independent entity as part of the debt write-off when David Johnson-Davies also departed in 1986.

Perhaps Acornsoft's own management foresaw the decline in Acorn's fortune, as they didn't try to financially isolate the popular developer from its parent. Acornsoft remained as a publisher in name-only after liquidation and several pieces of intellectual property transferred to Leeds-based Superior Software. Richard Hanson, Managing Director of Superior negotiated the deal, and didn't have an interest in re-releasing or developing further releases from Killworth.

[Richard Hanson] The Superior/Acornsoft agreement covered specific rights to a relatively small number of previously published Acornsoft titles. I don't recall all the details of the discussions regarding the agreement, but the talks were mainly focused on the major Acornsoft titles.

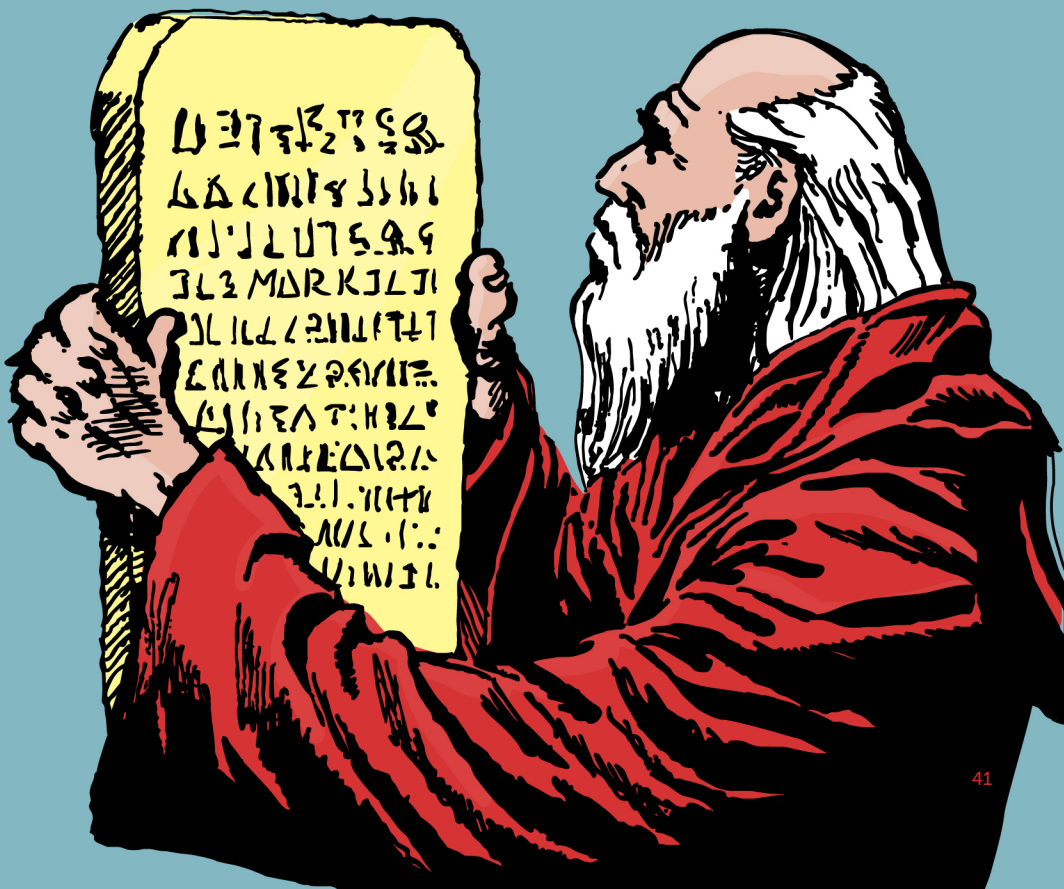
Thankfully Killworth managed to secure the rights and ownership to the Phoenix titles, though it remains unclear whether Peter renegotiated the rights with Superior or obtained them via the fire sale of Acornsoft. Nevertheless, despite the legal shenanigans he continued to work on games and brought another treasure-hunting

Phoenix game over to home computers in the form of *Monsters of Murdac* – another Thackray/Partington effort this time ported to the Amstrad computer. Without the requisite knowledge of Alan Sugar's machine, Killworth was assisted by Amstrad specialist Richard Clayton of Locomotive Software who crammed the game system into 64K. It was originally destined for the manufacturer's own Amsoft label, but suffered a blow when it was rejected and ended up in the hands of nondescript publisher Globe Software. It came in for a particularly stinging review in Amstrad Action who criticised virtually every aspect of the game, singling out its seemingly archaic and obsolete approach to adventure design. Killworth entered into a public debate with the article's writer, and this spat is covered in depth by Jimmy Maher on his excellent blog. It was a conflict of design philosophy from Killworth, and he was challenged for ignoring what players and reviewers had come to expect from adventures - the games having a missing or minimal EXAMINE command for example.

[Jonathan Partington] The culture in the Cambridge world was that EXAMINE was redundant if you gave a full description - why make the player EXAMINE everything? Also, that you could save the game before trying anything hazardous, so we didn't feel so guilty about killing people off. There was even an art in setting puzzles that could not be solved by trial and error.

It was these reasons that so many players found the Killworth and Phoenix series a demanding task, and certainly the labelling of games as "advanced" were correct. Perhaps it was the academic approach to the world of adventuring, rather than willing to be commercial or more pragmatic that meant the later games didn't review as well as they should. Killworth told Micro Adventurer that his approach fell between two designs: The first, a larger, more sprawling game, with more rooms, but limited puzzles: And the second, smaller games with a more finite amount of exploring but more puzzles. "My games are of the second sort" he said, "I'd far rather use memory on cunning ideas than on providing lots of locations."

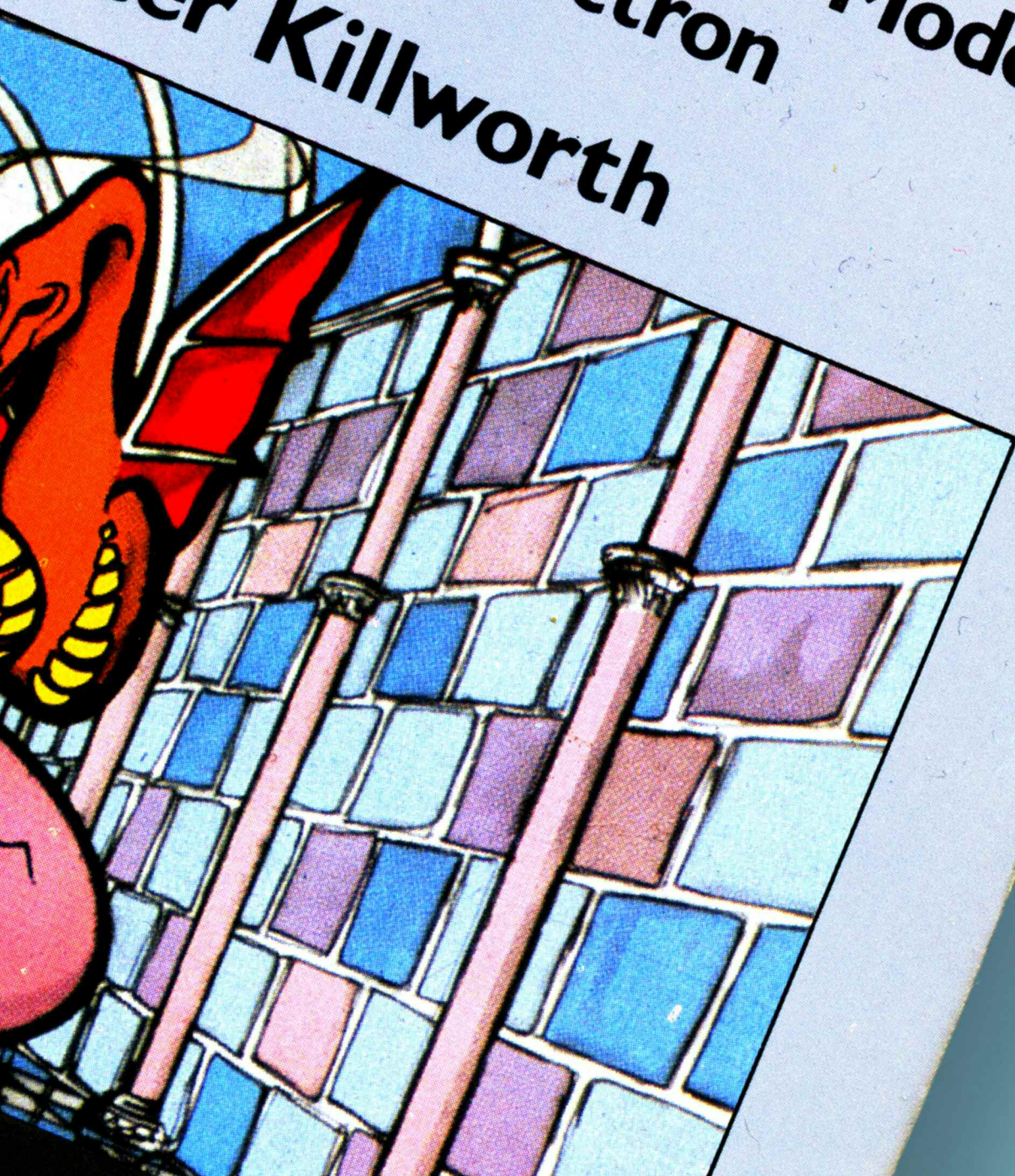
With the rights to the Phoenix games secured and the Amstrad Action debacle behind him, Killworth contacted Brian Kerslake former head of educational software house Chalksoft. Together they formed Topologika Software and released a new title, *Giant Killer* in



How To Write VENTURE GAMES

BBC Microcomputer Model B and Acorn Electron

Peter Killworth



[Opposite] Peter Killworth's book, *How To Write Adventure Games*, still raises a pretty penny on the rare occasions it appears on auction sites.

SEVENTH HEAVEN

Even though Peter Killworth was synonymous with Acornsoft adventures, they became enamored by the market for the genre and broadened their game catalogue with titles from other authors. *Gateway to Karos*, *The Seventh Star*, *Sphinx Adventure*



and *Spooky Manor* [an educational adventure for children as young as 7] came from the pens of David Hampton, Paul Fellows and Derek Haslam.

Though *Seventh Star* and *Karos* remain relatively rare, *Sphinx Adventure* gained popularity and a wider audience after being ported to the Acorn Electron. It was even sold along with the hardware in later boxed releases.

April 1987. It pulled on Peter's love of numeracy and was designed as "A Maths adventure for ages 10 to adult" containing puzzles based around mathematical activities. It achieved little success commercially, and thus its impact is often understated, or completely forgotten. Jimmy Maher reminds us of its importance: "*Giant Killer* [...] has been largely overlooked or dismissed in histories of [adventure game] culture. [...] Like *The Oregon Trail* in the United States, these games are inescapable memories for Britons who attended primary school [in the 80s]."

Topologika trawled the Acornsoft back-catalogue and all of the adventure titles were re-engineered, polished, expanded and shipped in stylish folio cases with new artwork. *Countdown to Doom*, *Philosopher's Quest* and the full mainframe version of *Kingdom of Hamil* were rewritten using the newly developed engine that had debuted with *Acheton*. The Topologika team devised an ingenious on-line hint system into each game where you selected a problem number from the included hint sheet and typed HELP followed by that number [repeatedly if you needed decreasing cryptic answers] into the command editor. Most of the games averaged around 150K and had releases on the majority of home computers that were able to support the size of the databases via disk media. Even with access to new technology such as the Spectrum +3, Acorn Risc machines and even the Atari ST, Topologika retained the archaic limited word parser. Maher commented on this inability to move with the times: "The Phoenix games are often remarkable for how many interesting puzzles they are able to coax out of their limited parsers and world models, but this is merely a product of artful designing around the engine's constraints" he concluded.

[Jonathan Partington] David and Jon never seemed very interested in going beyond 2-word commands. We did encounter *Zork* a bit later, not my favourite, as you needed to understand American

AND THAT’S MAGIC!

Peter Killworth had a love of magic, and through his relationship with David Johnson-Davies [Acornsoft’s Managing Director and fellow amateur magician] they devised a new software package that enabled the player to deliver a conjuring masterclass with the aid of their BBC Micro.

Paul Daniel’s Magic Show was released in time for Christmas in 1984. Ten tricks were included in a thoroughly underwhelming package. The press liked it, but not a lot.

culture such as baseball to solve some of it, which did have a better parser, but they never wanted to copy its syntax.

Return to Doom, and *The Last Days of Doom* were two final Killworth titles that completed his *Doom* trilogy. *Last Days* employed another move counter in order to ramp-up the tension for the player as they rushed to escape the planet Doomawangara once more. Peter Redrup, aka The Mad Hatter, adventure guru for Micro User magazine waxed lyrical about the title in 1990; “*Last Days of Doom* is a complex adventure ideally suited to moderate-to-experienced players” he said, concluding that it contained excellent prose brimming with atmosphere. In a final twist, Killworth allowed just enough time for the player to save themselves, but to sacrifice their crew to a worse fate. Killworth mused that “the death of the crew is one of several features designed both to worry the player, and to make him question the morality of many of the normal actions in an adventure game.”

In the end, Topologika continued well beyond the peak of the adventure market, into the early 1990s, converting Phoenix titles *Avon*, *Hezarin* and Jonathan Partington’s *Spysnatcher* [that had a version written for the BBC/Electron but was never released].

[Jonathan Partington] *Spysnatcher* [was] the last game I was involved with, and the only one written directly for the commercial market. Jon Thackray and I met one evening per week in 1987-ish to develop the plot of the game, then I wrote it for the Cambridge computer using the Seal/Thackray language. Once debugged and tested, it was converted for home computers.

It was diminishing returns for Killworth and company, and they were never able to scale the dizzy heights of the early 80s having the weight of Acornsoft’s brand and marketing behind them. Peter tragically died in 2008 from motor neurone disease, sadly before the latest renaissance of interactive fiction and classic text adventures. The later Killworth games, *Last Days* in particular, demonstrate that he still had a love for the genre and was able to deliver a game with substantial prose and atmosphere – in distinct opposition to the critics of the Topologika releases. Given today’s resource rich platforms, we can only speculate on how he could he have made use of his considerable talents in writing more games, along with the additional of more original, unforgiving and fiendish ways of killing the player.

Professor Jonathan Partington is currently the Programme Manager for M.Sc. Mathematics and related programmes at the University of Leeds. He remains modest about his substantial gift to the adventure genre.

[Jonathan Partington] I am very out of touch. It’s good to see that people still take an interest in text adventures, just as some people still read books without pictures, and Peter’s role was clearly an important one, both in writing games himself and in getting them onto microcomputers, so that they had a life outside Cambridge.



RESISTANCE

Set in the German occupied French village of Sarle, *Resistance* is a World War II thriller of espionage and guerilla warfare as one young woman seeks revenge for the cruelty and suffering inflicted on her family.

It's incredible that 36 years after it's release, Gilsoft's *The Quill* is still inspiring budding adventure authors in the 21st century to delve into the genre. One recent homebrewer is British best-selling novelist Andy McDermott, who in January 2019 released his gritty wartime adventure *Resistance* to the ZX Spectrum community.

Andy, best known for his Nina Wilde and Eddie Chase series of adventure thrillers, has turned his hand to the subject of the Second World War II, casting the player as French resistance fighter Mari Roux, a young woman who has sworn revenge on her nation's Nazi conquerors. After the death of her father, mother and the capture and forced labour of her brother at the hands of their oppressors, she follows Mari's attempts to join the Resistance movement. She finally gets a response, and the game starts with her heading south of the village Sarle to meet the mysterious Jean Agreste. After the meeting, Mari is giving a series of missions to fulfil, from destroying Nazi propaganda, defiling flags, to unmasking Nazi sympathisers in the village and derailing trains. The final nail-biting sequence sees a desperate attempt by Mari to save Jean himself, and climaxes in the freedom fighter having to give everything for the cause and wrestling with her conscience over making the ultimate sacrifice.

Originally planned for the Acorn Electron, Andy ditched his efforts for the restricted Elk and switched to the comfort of 48K on the ZX Spectrum after feedback from the 8-bit Adventure Group on Facebook. He's done little with the visual appeal of the game, maintaining the sparse presentation provided by default in *The Quill*, opting for a text-only effort without graphics or a redefined character set. Not that it matters, because it's packed with the things that really count - atmosphere and tension, two attributes that *Resistance* delivers in bucketloads. Gareth Pitchford, author of *Twilight Inventory*, and a man that knows a thing or two about indie adventures, waxed lyrical about the game on the Spectrum Computing website. "[Its] amazing how much atmosphere and a sense of place can be generated by such sparse writing", he enthused, adding that "there are some excellent moments of tension and all the puzzles make sense, and don't require mind-reading to solve."

From the outside it seems like a small game - there's only 45 or so locations, but it's imperative that you make a map as you'll find yourself wandering [or cycling] backwards and forwards many times throughout the village to fulfil the missions. Andy has filled the remaining memory with an expansive vocabulary, giving plenty of verb-noun alternatives to solving the clever puzzles that frequent the game. The logic has been simplified too, so the player is never searching for the right things to say or do in order to achieve their goal. He's also learned from his youthful 1980s experiences of playing unforgiving adventures on the Spectrum and Commodore by removing several occasions where instant deaths [usually by doing things in front of the Nazis or the Milice Française - French Militia] could occur.

My only gripe, and it's a small one, is not much can be examined. Andy has taken a Peter Killworth approach to the objects in a game - a cup is a cup, sticks are sticks, a bike is a bike - what else does the player need to know? So, an EXAMINE statement yields the response "You see what you expect". Regardless, it's a gripping game, packed with character and one that delivers plenty of suspense and surprise. Its wartime theme complements the swathe of games based upon Colditz, and other great WWII adventures such as the RamJam Corporation's *Valkyrie 17* and Salamander Software's *Wings of War*. *Resistance* is a cracking addition to the genre.

Andy's next game is already in development, based upon a science-fiction plot he had an idea for 15 years ago. He plans to use *PAWS*, so given the potential of that tool, and how good this game is, we can only look forward to his next creation.

RESISTANCE RESISTANCE RESISTANCE
by Andy McDermott © 2019

France, 1943

You are Mari Roux, age 17, of the town of Sarle. Your soldier father died in the Nazi invasion; your mother dying of grief soon after. Your older brother was forced to work in Germany, and you have not heard from him for a year.

You have tried to contact the Resistance to fight back. Finally, the time has come. A note from a man called Jean Agreste has asked you to meet him at the old barn south of town...

Press any key

Your home, a modest but comfortable cottage. Without your family, though, it feels cold and empty. A door leads S.

Things of interest:
Knife
Note from Jean

▶GET KNIFE
You get the knife - and Marc Danard emerges from the shadows! "That is no kitchen knife!" he snaps. "I knew you were a traitor! Give up, little girl - or I will kill you." He advances menacingly on you.

▶KILL DANA

Format: ZX Spectrum
Developer: Andy McDermott
Price: Free
Website: <http://www.andy-mcdermott.com>
Download: <https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/>
Release Date: January 2019

The old barn. Though derelict, there are still sacks of animal feed here.

Things of interest:
Jean Agreste

Jean says, "Now, it is time we send a message to the local collaborators. Dupain the baker is one of them; I want you to destroy his livelihood. Do not kill him - a fire should be enough of a warning."

Press any key

"They have forced too much from me already. You must destroy this place, Mari - and me with it. It is the only way to protect the Resistance."

▶EXAM JEAN
Jean has been brutally beaten and is missing several fingers, chopped off by the hatchet. He is locked in the cell.

"I saw munitions from the train crash being stored here," Jean tells you. "If you start a fire, the whole chateau will go up! You have to-"

He breaks off at the sound of approaching footsteps.

▶

CHRIS AINSLEY

Chris Ainsley's first text adventure experience was in the murk of the *Smuggler's Cove* on his ZX Spectrum. It fired a lifelong love for adventure games, culminating in him writing a modern internet browser based text adventure engine called *Adventuron*.

Chris Ainsley's early gaming memories are playing Atari 2600 games on a weekend with his grandmother, whilst 80s TV favourite 3-2-1 played in the background. *Smuggler's Cove* was the first of the genre he remembers, but it's Philip Mitchell and Veronika Megler's *The Hobbit* that really grabbed his interest, and he recalls many evenings spent with his entire family, hunched around their ZX Spectrum attempting to solve its puzzles.

He's a graduate of Teesside, with a strong skill-set in Computing and IT in general. After a spell living in Tokyo for 6 years he's back in the UK working on various personal projects, including his own modern text adventure engine called *Adventuron*.

[Chris] *[Adventuron]* started as a fun demo of model based development software. I wanted to prove that it was possible to host a powerful scripting language, with editor and tooling in the browser. [...] Though initially designed as an engine for gamebooks, *Adventuron* soon morphed into a text adventure engine. [...] I just wanted something web-based that would look and feel like the adventure games I knew and loved.

It's a clever piece of technology, written to work in most modern web browsers. *Adventuron* works using the same principle as tried and tested adventure creators such as *The Quill*, *PAWS*, *GAC* etc. It has a game loop triggered by the user's input, or the passage of time and

interrogates tables to know what to do next. To anyone that used one of those earlier 80s system, the structure will be familiar. There is a locations, connections, objects and events table that holds the valuable adventure data and logic. The difference with *Adventuron* is that, free of the memory constraints of 8-bit computers, the author can really run riot with any concept.

[Chris] The advantage of this approach is that back-porting to 8-bit might be possible in the near future too - for games that use that subset of features.

In the spirit of *The Quill* and *The Graphic Adventure Creator* before it, *Adventuron* authors don't have to be advanced programmers [in Java or JavaScript in this case] to be able to write their own games. Another advantage over those old systems that *Adventuron* has is it's pure speed. The response time of the parser is instant, sometimes spoiling what Chris refers to as the "feel" of an adventure. This is especially prevalent when the system has been used to write or convert 8-bit adventures where the original platform computer often paused because of technical speed before returning a reply.

[Chris] Getting the feel right has been a challenge. So, if the moment you press the ENTER key, the response is already on screen, then even though there is still cause and effect, it actually feels like you are receiving a canned response because the response arrives



[Opposite-Top] *Adventuron*'s split-panel development environment. Any changes to the script in the left pane can be instantly tested in the gameplay panel to the right. [Opposite-Bottom] A screenshot from Chris Ainsley's experimental adventure, *The Path*.

seemingly instantly. Having a command submission pause for about 200 milliseconds actually “feels” a little bit better. Such behaviour is of course overridable by the player. Of course, pressed keys should be buffered instantly, even during the pause.

One of the biggest challenges for anyone wishing to develop a classic text adventure on modern platforms is the mobile devices themselves and the lack of a physical keyboard. Trying to play emulated text adventures is almost impossible and exceptionally unwieldy. *Adventuron* goes some way in providing workarounds to this, by an array of clever design considerations.

[Chris] Laying things out on mobile is a burden. On large screens, you want to have tight control over layout of the screen, but on mobile the opposite is the case. You just want the content neither to take too little space, where it's hard to read, or too much space, where you can barely see anything because of the huge overhead of the on screen keyboard. On mobile, games with less text tend to work better than text-heavy game. *Adventuron* has been designed to format verbose content for the screen size with the game author able to conditionally include and exclude, and even change content depending on screen type.

Other features have also been added, several of which started to appear in the genre in the 80s, such as the ability to change typography, graphics, and ambient and spot sound effects. There's a multitude of connotations and the ability to customise the playing experience adds to *Adventuron*'s appeal.

[Chris] Everyone has their own preference [and] I hope convenience will win out in the end and the best adventure is the one you are one click away from writing or continuing to play.

About ten games so far have been authored with the system, and the number is gradually increasing as Chris' *Adventuron* Facebook community continues to grow. Zenobi's John Wilson was an early adopter, and to-date has been the most prolific adventure author to embrace it.

Over a period of 18 months he's ported a vast number his back catalogue of titles alongside producing new adventures such as *Behind Closed Doors 7*, *Bulbo and the Intrepid Adventure*, *Roachy II*, and *Ramsbottom Smith and the Yellow Spheroid*.

[John Wilson] The thing I found so exciting about *Adventuron* was that it enabled me to re-write old games and to add features that I had never thought possible when I first wrote them. Both 'Fuddo & Slam' and 'Bulbo and the Lizard-King' had graphic slideshows on the 'B side' of the tape and now I was able to include those graphics in these new formats. [...] I was able to input the story code, test it and amend as necessary as I went along. Without *Adventuron* I can honestly say that 'Rammy' would never have seen the light of day and the resultant port to the good old Spectrum format would never have taken place. For that I am eternally grateful to Chris.

Alongside the Zenobi games, Adventure author and writer Gareth Pitchford has ported two of his mini-adventures, *The Hoppit* and *Quest for the Holy Snail* and a brand new Ernie Spludge game *Scout's Honour*, to *Adventuron*. Richard Pettigrew authored *Escape from Dinosaur Island* and submitted it to the interactive fiction competition IFComp in 2018. Finally Blerkotron ported his Halloween-themed adventure *Unhallowed*, using one of *Adventuron*'s tools that enables it to import and convert existing adventure utility.

[Chris] I have created converters for *The Quill* and *PAWS* adventure game formats so far. In future, *Phoenix*, *GAC*, *DAAD*, *SWAN* and more should be possible. I'd say that *GAC* is probably next in line,

CODE IN THE COMMUNITY

If you want to get involved with the project as an adventure author Chris has created a Facebook group that you can join as a budding author:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/18241171044466518/>

He commented, “[it's] small but friendly [group], and there are a few people that seem to be doing something or other with the system right now. *Adventuron* is getting more capabilities, and as it grows, hopefully, its attractiveness to authors will grow too.”

Make sure you join up and give the excellent tool a try.

followed by *DAAD*. [...] Bringing a *Quill* or *PAWed* game to the platform is easy and a basic conversion is a click of a button away. That said, I'm acting as somewhat of a gatekeeper for these tools. The porter must prove they have permission from the current rights holders and the port must also not be adult or grossly offensive or illegal in nature.

It's certainly a utility to keep an eye on. He's recently worked on a special version of Linda Wright's *The Beast* [featured elsewhere in this issue] and has acquired the rights to create a remake of Alternative Software's *Excalibur*, with the blessing of the original author Ian Smith and artist Shaun McClure.

[Chris] I wanted a simple game that features graphic interactivity, and I knew this game, having previously purchased it from a local pet shop 30 years ago. [...] It's pretty faithful to the original, and other than the tutorial mode, and the standard *Adventuron* platform features. It's just the game as it was, with some tiny tweaks.

Excalibur features a new tutorial mode, added as a way to introduce new players to the genre, and also as a method of removing some of the game's more difficult puzzles.

[Chris] The idea of adding the tutorial is that I was trying to write a text based tutorial for teaching absolute novices to play adventure games, and it was so wordy that I thought it might work better if the game itself was whispering in the newcomers ear.

The full release in the near future will allow games to be installed as local applications on most modern desktop and mobile operating systems.

Recently *Adventuron Classroom* has launched. It's an educational version of the utility designed for children and parents who want to create their own interactive stories via a series of colourful and exciting tutorials. And, if that's not keeping Chris busy enough, he's also using *Adventuron* to write his own game called *The Path*.

[Chris] I decided to make a game where there was a minimal amount of dead time, and that could possibly be completed in less than five minutes, that might be interesting to watch, and wouldn't require a huge attention span. [...] It's a very small title, driven by the actions rather than story. There is a definite tone to it, but it's almost completely devoid of narrative.

Chris and his wonderful creation can be found by visiting <https://adventuron.io> or via the decicated *Classroom* Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/adventuronclassroom>. Alternatively, follow *Adventuron* on Twitter at @LearnAdventuron.

MICRO ADVENTURER

Though the popularity of adventures in the 80s was huge, the genre was always fighting over a finite number of pages in mainstream magazines. Thankfully, Sunshine Publications launched the dedicated **Micro Adventurer** in the winter of 1983.

Micro Adventurer was a welcome specialist adventure magazine of the early 1980s. Published by Sunshine Publications it ran for a meagre 17 issues between November 1983 and March 1985. It was a delight in many ways, digging into corners of adventure gaming that were very rarely uncovered from reading the mainstream publishers of the day. In Acorn User, Crash, Zzap! or any of their brethren, the adventure columns usually numbered pages counted in single figures, leaving a huge range of games and personalities without exposure.

Editor Graham Cunningham led a diverse team of journalist for the majority of issues of Adventurer [with Brendon Gore later], including the services of the "Master Adventurer" himself, Tony Bridge. "Designed for novice and experienced adventures alike" it didn't restrict itself to a single genre. Keeping adventures as its main fodder, it discussed simulations, role playing games, play-by-mail, board games and strategy games too. Its platforms were as diverse as its subject matter, and journalists reviewed games on everything from the Dragon 32 and Oric, to the staple BBC Micro, Commodore 64 and Spectrum. With a lively letters page and a fantastic cartoon series by Stowell, it included a good

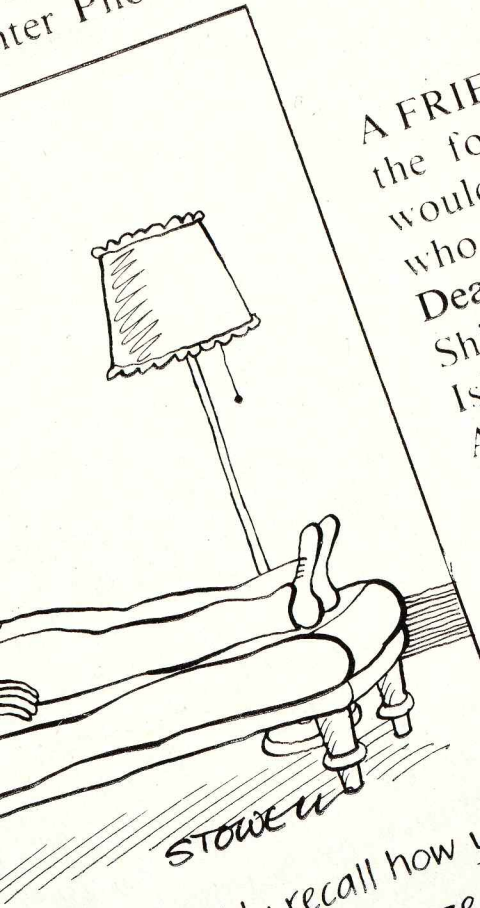
Publisher: Sunshine Publications
RRP: 75p (1985)
Buy it From: eBay
Website: <https://archive.org/>



as I am a
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three.

Offer of help



A FRIEND and I have finished the following adventures and would gladly help anyone who is stuck. Artic: Planet of Death, Inca Curse (1¼ hours) Ship of Doom, Espionage Island, Golden Apple. Scott Adams: Pirates Cove, Voodoo Castle, The Count. Quicksilver: Smugglers Cove. Melbourne House: The Hobbit. Level 9: Adventure Quest (most), Dungeon Adventure (half) Snowball Simon Clark, 4 Lower Tail, Carpenders Park, Watford,

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you could possibly recall how you
ed from the dragon's dungeon!"

range of how-to articles, discussing everything from plot, parsing to user defined graphics, and the occasional magazine including type-in programs such as character utilities and mini adventures

For the 21st Century adventuring enthusiast, Micro Adventurer is a rich source of original interview material [often in-depth] with the main protagonists of the era: Level 9's Austin Brothers, Infocom, Scott Adams and Peter Killworth all feature. We can also be thankful for several appearances in the magazine from the legendary Mike Singleton.

The reviews [or Software Inventory] sections and classified ads are a treasure trove of homegrown adventures, many that fell between the cracks of awareness of the mainstream adventurer. They contain a fascinating sample of early advertisements from software houses that would grow from their humble cottage industry beginnings into fabled status – 8th Day, Addictive Games, Gilsoft and Robico all appear in low-budget surroundings. But, as mentioned before, in the end it's the games that are the gems, and with the click of an internet search, many of these missing masterpieces and curios [though many remain MIA] can be downloaded and played on a decent emulator.

Sadly, the publication came to an end in 1985, with several internet

sites blaming a lack of revenue - which seems strange given that in 1985 the adventure market was really beginning to peak. The following two years saw many mainstream publishers [CRL, Level 9 and Adventure International to name but three] continue to release a raft of titles, and I'm sure that they would have welcomed targeted marketing to their core audience. Its diverse subject matter should also have helped, and it did re-label itself late in its life to "The computer strategy and simulation magazine" [ignoring adventures completely] in an effort to capture the emerging demograph. Perhaps it was its tendency, for some reason I'm yet to fathom, to have a fixation with random subjects such as TV series The Prisoner for example, which featured in numerous issues, and the space romp Blakes 7.

As disappointing as it is that the magazine didn't last longer into the PAWS, Zenobi and Magnetic Scrolls era, the gap was plugged by enthusiastic amateur editors and adventure fanzines such as Adventure Probe and Red Herring. From the Micro Adventurer back catalogue, of recommended reading are issues 4 [Gilsoft], 9 [Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson], 10 [Level 9], 12 [Peter Killworth], 13 [Scott Adams] and 16 [Douglas Adams]. They can all be downloaded and viewed from archive.org, and some of the more common issues do appear from time to time on eBay, though expect to pay premium prices.

micro
Adventurer

at Scott!

fixed it for Ken Matthews to
Adams — and playtest a
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micro
Adventurer

Ruffling the feathers in the Quill's

dips into adventure ink and Gils

MIKE WOODROFFE

Credited with introducing Britain to Scott Adams' adventures, **Mike Woodroffe** went onto become a well-respected adventure author in his own right, best remembered for games featuring outlaws, gremlins and a superhero granny.

At the start of the 80s Mike Woodroffe worked in the family business – a musical instrument shop in Birmingham. On the cusp of the digital revolution, The Woodroffes decided it was time to computerise the business, using one of the latest home micros that had started to appear from the US, and thus Mike bought a TRS80 with disk drive in the hope of modernising their stock control system.

It wasn't long before the lure of games software re-purposed the computer, and Mike became engrossed in Radio Shack's first text adventure game, *Pyramid Adventure*.

[Mike] We really enjoyed that type of game where [...] it's about solving the puzzles. It must be inbuilt in our breeding, it's difficult to know what it is – they're just great fun. Part of it is that age doesn't come into it. Ten-year-old kids can play adventures, so can 90-year-old people.

With his commercial and retail nous, Mike began to realise that computers would have a market in the home, and he opened Callisto Computers [named after one of Jupiter's moons] as a separate department inside of their music store. As with several other pioneering micro retailers, he soon found that the market for computers was hampered as there was little or no software available to make the purchase viable. He told Retro Gamer magazine "although we were selling Apple II's we found that there was a very big demand for software, but the only place we could really get a good supply was in America."

Casting his gaze across the Pond, Mike began importing

products from distributors such as Instant Software and began reselling them in his store. It wasn't long before one name stood out amongst the popular and best-selling software developers in the States – a name that was creating the kind of game that Mike had started to have a very fond affinity for – Scott Adams and his adventure series. Mike approached the distributor in the US and managed to secure an exclusive import deal for the Scott Adams Adventure Series. It was a huge coup for such a small operation, especially given that other entities in Britain had started to import American titles and were looking at the same distributors as Mike.

[Mike] All of Scot's original games were not compatible with British computers. If you think about it there were very few machines common to both markets, so his [original] software didn't make an appearance here.

At first Callisto imported Scott's games directly from the distributors, but after a time Mike started to deal directly and modified his import agreement with Adventure International [Scott's company] to manufacture the games and packaging in the UK. It was a far more cost-effective means of production but failed to address the growing range of micros such as the BBC Micro and Sinclair Spectrum that were appearing at home. Scott had mainly produced adventures for US machines, and his only foray at the time on a micro that had come to Europe's shores was his games on Commodore's VIC-20 machine - but these were on cartridge. There was no support for the UK market where Commodore had introduced the 64 and where the overwhelming majority of consumers were unable to afford



expensive disk systems and instead opted for the cheaper cassette storage.

What Mike needed was someone that could convert or port Scott’s games to run on British hardware, and he made his frustrating position known in one of the popular computer magazines of the time. Luckily Brian Howarth [see the feature on Brian in Issue 3] read the printed article and replied directly to Mike with an offer of help.

[Mike] Brian had written an interpreter for Scott Adam’s databases. I can’t remember why he wrote it, must have been a hobbyist project, but all we had to do was create a driver for each platform and we got the text adventure ported across. Then we wrote our own graphics language which hooked onto the front of it, and we carried on using the same basic system for most of our products.

Brian was originally hired as a freelance programmer and set to work on converting Scott’s adventure series onto a range of British hardware. Over the following year he created interpreters for over 6 micros and Scott’s games made a similar impact here as they had in the States. To boost the credibility of the company, Mike agreed with Scott to rename Callisto Software to Adventure International (UK) [AI:UK] and brought the mercurial adventure designer to Britain to promote his games.

[Mike] We brought him over to the shows for PR purposes. We put him a hotel and wine and dined him. It was good PR. We had him over a couple of times when we were releasing a new product. He was great, a lovely fella, [and] great hair! He was a larger than life character and was a good bloke.

For many British gamers it was in the company of Scott’s games that they had their first experience and fondness memories of adventures. They got to experience the likes of *Adventureland*, *Voodoo Castle* and *The Count* on their BBC Micros, ZX Spectrums, Acorn Electrons, Dragon 32s and even the smaller Commodore C16 machines. To match demand, Brian Howarth joined AI:UK full time alongside newly recruited artist Teoman Irmak, whose early experimentation with computer generated art had enticed him into exploring the industry.

[Teoman Irmak] Strangely [the connection] wasn’t my early computer work. [Mike] had seen my traditional cover illustrations on computer magazines, so I initially started working with [him] as a cover artist. I’d do the illustrations for the game box art, in watercolours or sometimes oils. I wasn’t an established digital artist at the time.

It was in the AI:UK office, whilst browsing graphics created on an Apple II that Teoman was challenged to do the same for his new employer.

[Teoman] They were very crude low resolution images but beautifully drawn. [...] “Can we get the graphics to look as good as this?” asked Mike. I was not at all sure, but I said “Yes I can!” So I gave up the paints and the brushes and picked up a mouse. The games that used plot and fill at the time were very slow. The more detailed the scene, the longer it took to draw. I was not keen to go down that route. One of the programmers came up with the idea of using the computers’ faster, text only screen mode. Instead of conventional text being written to the screen the newly reshaped ‘alphabet’ was used to create bits of the final image. Like a mosaic. It was really fast. The images appeared almost instantly and it was also extremely memory efficient. Very important at the time because most home computers did not have floppy disks to store a lot of images on and worse still, they had very limited internal memory.

[Mike] We were producing games for very small memory computers and the problem was getting the decent graphics. He designed a system of characters to produce the graphics. [...] That’s where Teoman was unbelievable.

[Teoman] The technique was enhanced by the fact that up to 3 text characters could be variously combined on top of each other to make a hybrid text replacement. As well as simple rotation, a basic arithmetic logic of AND, OR and EXCLUSIVE OR, was used to

combine the characters. So knowing computer code came in handy. Although combining binary bytes in this way was nothing like actually using machine code. So it is not strictly correct to say that the artwork was coded in assembler. The data was produced with some arithmetic logic but it was independent of the type of computer chips it was created to run on. Quite a few projects were accomplished this way.

Mike was delighted with the results and the press and players agreed. He told Sinclair Programs in September 85 that “the graphics rae incredible, no one gets the high quality pictures that we do”. They certainly gave their games the edge over the competition.

[Mike] A total edge. Nobody could come close. If you look at those early games the graphics are amazing. Teoman, I don’t know how he did it, but he could sit there and visual the character he wanted out of the set, and it was like, what, how did you do that? A very talented man, Teoman.

Riding the crest of the wave, Adventure International were approached in 1984 to partner with Marvel Comics and were offered

“[Scott] was great, a lovely fella, great hair! He was a larger than life character and was a good bloke.”

the entire catalogue of characters upon which to base a series of games. It presented a staggering opportunity to Scott, with magazine The Big K saying it was a “titanic meet-up [...] of two of the most influential forces in popular culture in recent years.”. Scott signed an equally titanic ten-year deal and planned a total of 12 games in his Questprobe series.

But the success came at a price. Even before the agreement Scott’s output had already started to decline. At his peak he was writing several adventures per year, but now his productivity slowed, and the development of *The Hulk* too almost a year. For Mike and AI:UK, the lack of product was starting to be a concern, and they found where they were unable to produce original IP under the Adventure International name restrictive.

[Mike] We were getting frustrated. We were getting demand like crazy and he couldn’t supply the product. We could see this market, but we couldn’t get the games out there to make serious money. [...] Scott wouldn’t let us create new products. He wouldn’t let us produce any Scott Adam’s adventures or get involved in the Marvel games.

From the planned total of 12 Marvel games, Scott produced just the three and failed to finish the fourth. It was hugely frustrating for AI:UK, who, given the excitement of the original deal had worked on a Marvel game on their own in the hope it would see the light of day.

[Mike] I had a design done for the Silver Surfer, that would have been the first one. It would have been amazing. It was very frustrating. There was such a big gap between [the Questprobe games]. They had this character called the Grand Inquisitor which Marvel modelled on Scott and put him into the comic. The marketing opportunity was immense but didn’t quite happen when it should have done.

Even with the mercurial Brian Howarth on board, Mike couldn’t match demand by turning to his trusted colleague to create original IP. When he featured on The Retro Hour podcast in 2018, Woodroffe commented at how quickly Brian could create adventures, rivalling the productivity of Adams himself. Unfortunately, the same conveyor-belt, turning out game-after-game [especially the Mysterious Adventure series] had also burnt Howarth out.

[Mike] I think [Brian] had the same problem as Scott. He had some great success with his early games, and the success distracted him. When he put his mind to it, he could knock an adventure out in a weekend, he was phenomenal. It was getting his focus, and his mind to it.



A voice BOOOOMS out:
Try --> "LOOK, JUMP, SWIM, CLIMB, FIND,
TAKE, SCORE, DROP" and any other verbs
you can think of...
---TELL ME WHAT TO DO ? YELL BEAR
Bear is so startled that he FELL off the
ledge!
---TELL ME WHAT TO DO ? GET MIRROR
OK
---TELL ME WHAT TO DO ? GO THRONE ROOM
---TELL ME WHAT TO DO ?
---TELL ME WHAT TO DO ? ■



You are on a sand flat. You see:
Castle de Belleme. Maid Marion.
EXITS: EAST WEST

O.K.
WHAT SHALL I DO NOW ? E
O.K.
WHAT SHALL I DO NOW ? EXAM CASTLE
In the distance you see Simon de
Bellemes castle.
WHAT SHALL I DO NOW ?



You are at Tropos customs, taxes must be
paid, the two Arcadian duty officers look
you over, searching for an excuse to
detain you.
=====

> LEAVE AIRLOCK

> TALK TO OFFICERS
The Arcadians regard you with contempt!
>

[Adventureland] The landmark adventure from Scott Adams which introduced the genre to so many players in Britain - courtesy of Brian Howarth's exemplar conversions.

Though the parser, graphics and text are somewhat crude compared to later games, it's a classic treasure hunt that contains endless devious puzzles from Scott, and influenced virtually every single adventure game that came after.

[Robin of Sherwood] Based upon the popular TV series, *Robin of Sherwood* [along with *Gremlins*] represented the zenith of Brian Howarth and Mike Woodroffe's powers as adventure writers.

It has bags of atmosphere, loads of characters to interact with and after a rather tricky opening sequence of puzzles, settles down to follow the swashbuckling tale of Robin Hood the outlaw closely.

Add into that a sophisticated parser, some superb Teoman Irmak graphics and you probably have the best adventure release from Mike's company. What a shame that the proposed sequel *Seven Swords of the Wayland* failed to materialise.

[Rebel Planet] The second instalment of the Fighting Fantasy series after *Seas and Blood* was published via US Gold and had Stefan Ufnowski at the design and programming helm.

Though contemporary companies such as Level 9 had approached their gamebook conversions by creating multiple choice games, AdventureSoft chose the traditional text adventure route for their games.

Rebel Planet was praised by the press for it's humour and excellent graphics, but fell for continuing criticism from ZZap!64 whose team seemed to be drawing tired of the genre.

The culmination of the Scott Adams Graphic Adventure series, *The Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle*, arrived too late to save the US company. *Claymorgue* was an enjoyable game and arguably Scott's best despite being little more than a rehash of *Adventureland* with collecting treasure replaced by magic spells. It did have some excellent writing, a slightly more advanced parser and some devious puzzles.

Adventure International filed for bankruptcy in 1985 leaving its UK partner without a source of new games. Mike went back to Brian and tried to convince him to revive the Mysterious Adventure series. Micro Adventurer reported in January 1985 that the next games in the series were already in development. Perhaps for reasons given before, the rumoured continuation of the series, games *Midwinter*, *After the Fire* and *Beyond the Infinite* were never released. Despite that, the original Mysterious games was up for grabs and AI:UK negotiated with Channel 8 Software [with whom Brian had re-published the games] for a deal. Despite a dispute over the forthcoming C16 conversions of the games and a disagreement between Channel 8 guru John Williams and Mike about who owned what, the rights were settled after some litigation. In the end Woodroffe settled for the licences for the series that excluded him publishing games for the Tandy and the Sord [an obscure Japanese Z80-based home computer] but did account "for all current and future releases". That meant that any further products by Brian would have been AI:UK's.

[Mike] By then the market had gone for them, so Brian wasn't producing more products in that range. He concentrated on our licences.

The move towards licencing was in response to AI:UK's lack of product. Mike went search of deals, and with the liquidation of Scott's company the restrictive agreement on creative IP was defunct. Terry Pratchett's Discworld [a comic fantasy series of books] was first on his wish list, but following the brush-off from his agent, Mike was unable to arrange to meet the famous man in the hat. [Fergus McNeill in 1986 was able to secure the first game, and an adventure too in *The Colour of Magic* written by Delta 4 for Piranha]. Undeterred, Mike headed State-side in search of other potential tie-ins and picked up the rights to Warner Brothers' cult-film *Gremlins*.

[Mike] We were quite progressive with our licencing. [...] We went to see LCA licencing company in America. We literally went in, had lunch and came out with [the *Gremlins*] licence. How did we do that? How did we just walk in there and get the licence for a product like that? It was crazy.

Gremlins was such a coup. With Steven Spielberg's involvement the movie was box office gold [taking \$12m in its first weekend just behind *Ghostbusters*] with its zany horror-comedy theme appealing to both teenagers and adults-like. The game was to be just as important for AI:UK. A landmark title in fact, and the first that actively promoted Brian as the author, rather than the conversion programmer.

The game design was excellent, making best use of the film's plot and locations [the quantity in the game probably hamstrung by the increase in quality of graphics and added animations] and the puzzles had the player jumping backwards and forwards to find more ingenious [and often gruesome] ways of disposing of the little monsters.

[Mike] Brian and I did the story on [*Gremlins*] [...] We worked separately, in our own holes. [I contributed] direction, design, [and] some BASIC coding on *Gremlins* - but I don't code. I can't PUSH and POP which all the programmers were doing!

[Teoman] I remember doing something "like" animation for *Gremlins*. But it was basically just flipping predefined blocks. It was movement of sorts perhaps but not what I would now call animation.

STAND BACK SUPERMAN, ICEMAN, SPIDERMAN ...

Adventure Soft were contracted by Blaydon Upon Tyne publisher Tynesoft in 1986 to write *Blizzard Pass* [by Alan Cox] and a game based upon geriatric superpowered kids TV show *Supergran*.

"That was a bit of fun. Trevor Scott got the licence for *Supergran* and came to us to help with the writing. It was a terrible product but was great fun to do" recalls Mike.

Gremlins went onto become one of AI:UK's biggest selling titles, helped with the clamshell cassette inlay artwork featuring the iconic Gizmo character from the film – it stood out in adverts and on the shelves. Every single magazine raved about Teoman's graphics and Brian and Mike's writing. ZZap!64 awarded it a sizzling 80% and said, "*Gremlins* is definitely up to Brian Howarth's usual high standards and worth splashing out on". Home Computing Weekly gushed, "the stunning graphics [...] are quite incredible and add a lot to the atmosphere." Keith Campbell, the much-respected C8VG adventure columnist gave it a wieldy 9, saying "[I greatly enjoyed] the *Gremlin* in the blender, who, when you start it, falls in head first. His Legs stick out of the top and start revolving! It quite reminded me of the time I ran over a frog with the hover-mower."

The reviews were testament to the collaboration between Brian and Mike, and *Gremlins* gained the recognition from the industry it deserved by coming runner-up in the 1985 Golden Joystick Awards for Adventure Game of the Year [in good company with *Bored of the Rings* but pipped for the prize by Level 9's *Red Moon*]. Mike's gamble and investment in the licence had paid-off.

[Mike] Well they weren't cheap, but they weren't silly. The ones with a big up-front we never touched, we just couldn't do it. Although the sales were good, they aren't what they're like today where you're talking millions of pounds. if you sold 40 or 50 thousand units you were doing well – but you're selling them at 3 or 4 quid each. The numbers are just not the same, anywhere near.

The zenith of AI:UK's adventures came with their next licence, *Robin of Sherwood* and *the Touchstones of Rhiannon*. The Richard Carpenter HTV/Goldcrest TV series first aired in 1984 and became a household hit in Britain, with credit given to the dashing good looks of star Michael Praed. They'd been a few attempts at a Robin Hood tie-in before, with Artic's *Adventure H*, and TS Software's imaginatively titled *Robin Hood*, but it was the prominence of the TV show that put the game into the forefront of the buying public's mind.

[Mike] It was big TV show and I like the Robin Hood story and it gave us a hook into a licence that would work. We got to use Sean Connery's son [who took over the lead after Praed's departure] and it worked well in the UK, but it didn't travel internationally [...] and Germany was the best market for us long-term.

Ironically, one of AI:UK's best adventures was written without their illustrious programmer and author: *Sherwood* was completely written by Mike without the aid of Brian. He constructed the entire story, going to painstaking lengths to ensure that the plot of the game closely followed the classic tale of the highway man [though

the opening scenes mirrors one of the TV shows] searching for six touchstones to please the forest god Herne the Hunter. Howarth’s engine and parser was used, and it perhaps was beginning to show its age, but Mike’s adept skill and evolving puzzlecraft was able to keep the action moving at a steady pace.

[Mike] I always used to work backwards. Right, what’s the aim of the game, that’s the final thing and then work the puzzle chain out backwards. I used to take the story, take the key events and then start with the end and work backwards. That way you always know where you want to end up. You can be far more creative with your puzzles. Work out the plot backwards.

A sequel was widely reported to be in development, titled *The Seven Swords of the Waylands*, based upon one of the episodes of the TV show. Several interviews hint at the game’s content and a novel ability to switch between several playable characters. With Mike contemplating dropping the AI:UK brand in search of a new publisher, the game never went into production [along with a Gremlins arcade game], even though the press reported that the Robin licence had been successfully transferred to the new company identity [Adventure Soft] and publisher [US Gold]. Work started on another licence, this time the Fighting Fantasy role-playing adventure novels by Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson. Though the reader navigated through the books by selecting pre-determined multiple-choice routes, Mike felt it better that they receive the classic text adventure treatment over the approach Level 9 took with *Adrian Mole* and *The Archers*.

[Mike] We liked the way the books worked apart from jumping around the pages which was cumbersome. We thought it would make a good computer game.

The first game, *Seas of Blood* [Mike liked Pirates] was Mike’s attempt at getting the first dice-rolling combat system into a computer game [perhaps beaten to it by Puffin’s literal conversion of *The Forest of Doom*], though the result wasn’t as random as he would have liked.

[Mike] If you ever talk to Alan Bridgeman who did the programming, ask him how to write a random number generator. It was never random. We had to force it to be un-random to make it appear random. Alan insisted it was random, but I said, how can it be, we get the same result six times in a row!’

Rebel Planet and *Temple of Terror* were released in 1986 and 1987 respectively, alongside a hugely ambitious collaboration with Steve Jackson and Games Workshop called *Swordmaster*. It was advertised as “the best computerised version of Dungeons and Dragons every produced” and “the definitive role-playing adventure from the pen of the world’s leading author and the keys of the world’s leading software house.” It was never released.

[Mike] The problem at that time was that a lot of the distributors where not financially sound, and the market wasn’t sophisticated enough for us to know that. We ended up taking some big hits with bad debts. Once you start to pay the licence fees and everything it got very tough. [...] I think it was Webster’s [the software offshoot of book distribution giant Webster Group] that was the final nail in the coffin. The problem was we used a system where we sold the invoices onto a third-party company who paid us on behalf of the companies we sold them onto - and they controlled the credit ratings and everything. But, here’s the thing: That works great as you’ve money to develop and you can start building and producing more product and stuff. But if you have a big player go down on you they claw back the next money all the money they’ve advanced on those sales. Webster’s hit the buffers and we had no money for three months as it was all being recouped on what they’d advanced us - and it just took us out.

There was a certain bittersweet taste to the liquidation of Adventure International UK. Publishing responsibilities were taken on by

Centresoft, a distribution powerhouse founded by US Gold creator Geoff Brown and in some respects partially responsible for the death of Websters. In a further quirk of fate, Geoff used to work for Mike in his music shop. Now Mike was knocking on his door to secure the future of his workforce. With their backing AdventureSoft developed games for Tynesoft and published two further US Gold adventures – *Masters of the Universe: The Super Adventure* and *Kayleth* - based upon a short story taken from Isaac Asimov’s Science Magazine. US Gold had planned a whole series of games based upon Asimov’s work, but like the other promised Fighting Fantasy releases *Appointment with F.E.A.R.*, *Demons of the Deep*, *Trial of Champions* and *Sword of the Samurai* they were never released.

[Mike] We got a long way with *Sword of Samurai*, into playtesting with that - there was a finished product. We had the artwork for the adverts and everything and it was all ready to go when we got hit with cashflow problems.

In the end the demands of being a work-for-hire company steered them from adventures and onto producing arcade [*Gauntlet* and *Captain America*] and RPGs [*Heroes of the Lance*] for US Gold - who had just secured their own lucrative Dungeons and Dragons licence. After leaving US Gold, Mike, Alan Bridgeman and Alan Cox formed Horrorsoft. Using their experience and evolving RPG design skills they developed for the emerging 16-bit markets. *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark* was one of their more popular hits. Teoman continued to produce artwork for AdventureSoft, helping with their arcade conversions and RPG. He continued his friendship with Brian Howarth and formed a partnership called Joined Up Writing. They did projects for Mirrosoft before Brian left the UK to work in the States.

For Mike it was his own son Simon who had a lasting impact on his destiny in the 1990s and beyond. Simon co-designed *Simon The Sorcerer* in 1993 for AdventureSoft – a point-and-click adventure that tapped into the tidal wave of games after LucasArts turned the genre on its head with *The Secret of Monkey Island*. With Chris Barrie providing an anarchic voice-over, Simon contained delightful graphics, fantastic prose and some tongue-in-cheek British humour, forcing it firmly into the British gaming psyche. It deservedly became a cult classic, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with its illustrious US influencers. The series spawned several sequels, all unfortunately without the talents of Barrie, and even ventured into the realms of 3D – something Mike regrets.

[Mike] We should have done *Simon 3* as a point-and-click adventure, not in 3D. The market wasn’t finished and we moved away too soon. We should have done more of what we were good at, and we made a mistake there.

A lot of love for Simon still exists, as does the love for Mike’s legacy in the industry. The original versions of Simon still sell well, with sales estimated at well over a million copies across all platforms. There’s a version for mobile, talk of port to Nintendo Switch and rumour of a completely innovative return of the teenage Wizard.

[Mike] Simon the Sorcerer may come back, you never know. We’re looking at going into a hybrid board game. Board games are experiencing fantastic growth. It’s my love of board games that got me into computer games really in the first place.

Preliminary talks are underway with a reputable boardgame company, and the game design revolves around the use of a digital app to increase the replayability by randomly generating scenarios and game dynamics. There’s talk of a potential Kickstarter, and a campaign that could include a set of highly desirable and collectable *Simon The Sorcerer* miniatures for the boardgame. As for Chris Barrie, could he make a return to provide the voice once again?

[Mike] I would like to think that he would. He has intimated that he would be up for it, but we haven’t spoken to him, so we need to speak



DESERT ISLAND DUNGEONS

Carrying a shipment of Mogwai and five text adventures, **Mike Woodroffe’s** cargo ship runs aground. Washed ashore, he awaits rescue, heeding the warnings not to get the creatures wet.

I would take *Zork*, I’d have to choose *Pyramid Adventure* from Radio Shack, and *Sherlock Holmes* by Infocom - they brought a new dimension to the games and were great products. I ought not to take my own because that’s naughty- *Supergran* – if only I could bury it when I got there. I’d probably take *The Colour of Magic* and I’d have to take Guybrush in *The Secret of Monkey Island* – does that count? That was just so good, it took the whole genre to another level.

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My thanks to the generosity of every contributor, who gave their time to humour me and answer questions they’ve been asked a thousand times before.

Special thanks to many friends, retro acquaintances, and text adventure geeks, including the usual kindness and help from:

Fergus McNeill
Tim Gilberts
Gerrard Sweeney
Gareth Pitchford

A non-exhaustive list of references and other useful information:

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Scott Adams, Inc.

Gremlins
Adventure International (UK), Warner Bros, Inc.

The Classic Adventurer
Written and designed by Mark James Hardisty

About the author

Mark James Hardisty is from Sheffield. His weekly pilgrimage to Just Micro as a child left him with an indelible love for Gremlin Graphics.

You can find Mark at @hardistymark, where he tweets about games, getting kids coding, The Cannonball Run, and his favourite game - *Elite* on the Acorn Electron.

This work is dedicated to:

My wonderful family – my mum Val, my beautiful wife Helen, and daughters Amelia Rose and Kitty Mae.

Fergus McNeill, a genius, and one of the kindest and humblest people I have had the pleasure of meeting. Thank you for *The Big Sleaze*.



